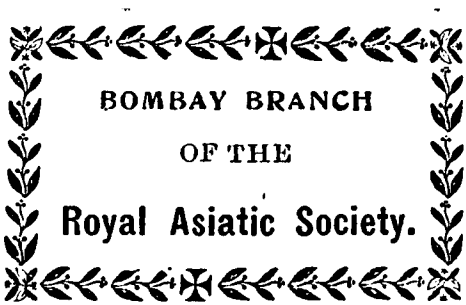
THE GIRLHOOD OF SHAKESPEARE'S HEROINES

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MARY COWDEN CLARKE



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PORTIA.

W. S. HERRICK.

THE GIRLHOOD

OF

SHAKESPEARE'S HEROINES;

A SERIES OF FIFTEEN TALES,

BY MARY COWDEN CLARKE,

AUTHOR OF "THE CONCORDANCE TO SHAKESPEARE."

A NEW EDITION,

76317

CONDENSED BY HER SISTER,

SABILLA NOVELLO.

WITH NINE ILLUSTRATIONS IN PERMANENT PHOTOGRAPHY,
FROM PICTURES BY T. F. DICKSEE,
ND W. S. HERRICK.



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PREFACE.

THE design of this work has been to trace the probable antecedents in the history of some of Shakespeare's women; to imagine the possible circumstances and influences of scene, event, and associate, surrounding the infant life of his heroines, which might have conduced to originate and foster those germs of character recognized in their maturity, as by him developed; to conjecture what might have been the first imperfect dawnings of that which he has shown us in the meridian blaze of perfection: and it was believed that such a design would combine much matter of interesting speculation, afford scope for pleasant fancy, and be productive of entertainment in the various narratives.

Although little or no attempt will be found in these tales to give pictures of the times in which their chief actors may be supposed to have lived, yet it is hoped that no gross violation of probability in period, scene, or custom has been committed. The development of character, not of history, has been the intention. In the case of the only historic personage who figures in these biographic tales—Lady Macbeth—names and facts have been used; but with as little regard to their strict place in history, as was paid by the poet himself, who took the story from the old chronicles, and modelled it after his own fashion.

If it be borne in mind that all *climax* in incident and sentiment was to be carefully avoided throughout these stories,—inasmuch as they are merely preliminaries to catastrophes already ordained,—the obstacles in the way of giving them

startling features of romance will be understood. The aim has been to invent such adventures as might be supposed to colour the future lives; to place the heroines in such situations as should naturally lead up to, and account for, the known conclusion of their subsequent confirmed character and after-fate; in short, to invest each story with consistent and *appropriate* interest.

I would also remind my indulgent readers (and may mine be such !), when they find me venturing to make Shakespeare's people act and speak, that here, his women are in their *girlhood*, —these are their "sallet days," when they are "green in judgment,"—immature,—but the opening buds of the future "bright consummate flowers" which he has given to us in immortal bloom; and I beseech my readers to believe that love, not presumption, prompted the subject of this series of stories :—

> "Not mine the sweetness or the skill,
> But mine the love that will not tire;
> And, born of love, the vague desire
> That spurs an imitative will."
>
> *In Memoriam.*

Shakespeare himself is my voucher that,—

> "Never anything can be amiss
> When simpleness and duty tender it;
> * * * * * * *
> And what poor duty cannot do,
> Noble respect takes it in might, not merit."

MARY COWDEN CLARKE.

Villa Novello, Genoa, 1879.



THE GIRLHOOD OF SHAKESPEARE'S HEROINES.

TALE I.

PORTIA; THE HEIRESS OF BELMONT.

IN the University of Padua, were, once upon a time, two fellow-students, who entertained for each other a more than usually lively regard. This regard seemed to grow out of a peculiar sympathy of feeling, which sometimes exists between two lads of like age, though of dissimilar conditions; for one of these students was lively, ardent, and prosperous, while the other was calm, reserved, and very poor. But though Guido di Belmonte was the son of a rich Italian Count, and the indulged heir of a fond father, yet his prosperity, instead of rendering him imperious and selfish, did but make him frank and generous; while Bellario, the other student, the less favoured of fortune,—found cheerfulness in the hope of achieving renown. Thus it came that these two young men found sympathy exist between them, and a warmth of friendship ensued, which burnt with a steady and kindly glow while life endured.

This early friendship was cemented by Guido's marriage with Bellario's sister; and the latter spent his time in alternate

labour at learned Padua and relaxation at lovely Belmont, until he rose to that position which had so long been the object of his ambition. While still young he was old in fame, and few lawyers of the time ranked in public estimation with the learned Doctor Bellario. Count Guido and his fair wife, Portia, dwelt in uninterrupted happiness on their estate, and their felicity was crowned by the prospect of an heir. In the midst of their joyous anticipation, came an express from Padua to summon Bellario thither, as his presence was required in an important case.

As he mounted his horse to depart, he waved his hand to Guido and Portia, who stood on the terrace to bid him farewell. "God bless you, my sister," he cried. "No son, mind! Give Belmont an heiress, as you value my brotherly love!"

He rode off hastily, and no foreboding whispered that the farewell had been for ever; and he was totally unprepared for the blow that smote him some days after, in receiving this terrible letter:—

"Our angel is now an angel indeed. Come and behold what lives to prove her earthly sojourn. An infant Portia is all that is left of our lost one, whose image alone rests in the heart of her miserable husband,

the most unhappy,

GUIDO."

The almost equally-afflicted Bellario lost no time in hastening to his friend; but when he arrived at Belmont, he found even the sad hope of bringing comfort by his presence was denied. As Madame Ursula, the ancient housekeeper, placed the infant Portia in his arms, she informed him that since the hour when the remains of the Countess had been consigned to the grave her unhappy husband had been seen by no one. He seemed suddenly to have vanished from the face of the earth with her whom he mourned. How or when he had disappeared was a mystery, and Bellario could hardly doubt that he had for ever lost a brother as well as a sister.

There was one slight circumstance, which alone permitted Bellario to hope that his friend had not madly destroyed himself. In Guido's study, he found a fragment of a paper apparently addressed to himself, though it was incoherent, abrupt, and written in evident distraction.

* * * "She will be your care, I know. All I have is hers—your justice and tenderness will be her best safeguard—should I ever return, she may—" * * * *

It was on these few last words, that Bellario founded his hope. They were all that remained to dispel his apprehension that his infant charge might be wholly orphaned; and he took a solemn vow that he would devote himself to her welfare, in the fervent trust that he might one day be permitted to replace her in the arms of a living father. Meanwhile, having ascertained that the affairs of the estate were placed in an advantageous condition for the future benefit of the infant heiress, he returned to the duties of his profession at Padua, until such time as she could profit by his presence and immediate superintendence. But he would frequently steal a day from his labours to ride over to Belmont, that he might indulge himself with a sight of the child. For in the small unformed features, and diminutive limbs, the force of affection taught him to find traces of his lost sister and friend; in the mite of a nose, and the wondering eyes, he thought he could read the animation and intelligent fire of Guido's expression; in the little dimpled hands, he fancied he discovered the slender fingers of Portia; and even in the fair golden curls of the little one he dreamed he beheld the raven tresses of her mother. So whimsical is the sweet blindness of love!

In the course of some months a period of vacation occurred, and the bachelor-uncle looked forward with absolute pleasure to the thought of spending some time with a mere child; the grave lawyer had learned to love nothing in the world so well as his little Portia.

And the little creature repaid his love with a fondness singularly intense in one so young. She seemed to have inherited her father's ardour of disposition, with much of her mother's gentle sweetness. She never tired of being with him;

and even showed none of the usual restlessness of children, when his serious occupations demanded his attention.

But these hours of needful stillness, were delightedly compensated by the games of romps, the races on the greensward of the avenue, the rides on the shoulder, and the scampers on horseback, that the fond uncle indulged her with, when he had concluded his day's avocations. Indeed, it is a question whether the indulgence was not as great on one side as the other; whether, in fact, the learned man did not as fully enjoy these innocent gambols as much as the frolicsome child did.

One morning, after breakfast, Bellario's papers and law-books were speedily despatched, and Portia started up from her toys, expecting to be summoned for a ride; but she saw her uncle take down a book from one of the shelves of the library, loll back and begin to read.

Now Portia, though so young a child, had already found out the difference between business-reading and pleasure reading; for she knew that when her uncle was leaning over those crackling parchments, and plain-looking books, while his pen occasionally dipped in the ink, and he wrote a few words, and his lips looked grave and unmoved,—he was on no account to be disturbed; but when she saw him stretch his legs carelessly out, lean back comfortably, and look at his book with happy eyes and smiling mouth, she knew then that she might scramble on to one of his knees, nestle her cheek against his bosom, and then sit on his lap and play with her doll without interrupting him. Nay, at such times of idle reading, she might feel that she was welcome; for the arm that supported her on his knee, would now and then give her a hug, or the head that bent over hers would press its lips upon her hair, when the leaf of the book wanted turning over.

She looked at him now, as he sat there reading, and wondered that he preferred sitting still, and reading on and on, instead of going out for a ride, or a race in the avenue, or a frolic on the lawn. "I suppose he finds reading very pleasant too; I suppose he likes reading as well as I like playing," and she presently said abruptly:—"I wish you would teach me my letters; I want to read with cugino mio."

Her uncle—or cousin, as she called him—caught her up in his arms with delight at finding that his hope was fulfilled; the sight of the pleasure derived from reading, had inspired the voluntary desire to taste that pleasure; of her own accord she wished to learn.

Thus they became closer companions than ever; and while Bellario beheld the happy looks, and gay smiles of the little creature, he could scarcely regret that she had no fitter playmate than a grave bachelor-uncle—a learned doctor of law.

But though the child and the bachelor-lawyer sufficed thus for each other's happy companionship, there were times when Bellario thought it might have been better, could his little Portia have had the society of other children. And an opportunity offered shortly after, for carrying out his desire. Madame Ursula confided to him a grievous trouble respecting a sister of hers, who had some time since degraded herself by marrying a small tradesman in Venice. "The miserable girl died;" said the dame; "soon after giving birth to a little girl. As for the poor wretch who dared to marry her, he is just dead, and has left his child without a single bagattino to bless herself with. She must go into service, of course; but she must wait till she is grown up, for that. I thought therefore, I would consult you, Signor Dottore, upon the propriety of letting the child come here and stay at Belmont, until she is old enough to become cameriera to the Contessina Portia. I will promise that the miserable little creature shall be kept strictly within the precincts of the housekeeper's apartments, and shall not be permitted to intrude upon the presence of either yourself or the Contessina."

"Let her come to Belmont by all means, Madame;" answered Bellario; "and pray do not restrict the children from playing together as much as they please. Your little darling will make a charming companion for mine, I doubt not."

A faithful servant, Balthazar, was despatched to Venice to fetch the little Nerissa to her future home; and Bellario told Portia of the new playfellow who was coming to be with her at Belmont. She answered that she wanted nobody to play with her but her own cugino; nevertheless he could perceive

that as the time drew near for the expected arrival, Portia's eyes were often directed towards the door of the saloon, where they were dining; Madame, as usual presiding at the head of the table.

At length they heard a horse's feet coming up the avenue, and Portia slid down from her chair to peep out of the window at the new-comer. Presently, they heard a child's voice, and then a peal of joyous laughter; the door opened, and Balthazar brought the child in, in his arms, while she was still shouting with merriment at some droll story he had been telling her.

This indecorous entry, scandalized Madame, and she frowned appallingly.

The little Nerissa, placed suddenly on her feet in the midst of strangers, stood transfixed, gazing at them; and as she scanned these new faces, the smiles faded from her lips, which she began to pull poutingly with one finger, eyeing the group askance.

"Take your fingers out of your mouth, do, child; and come here," said Madame Ursula.

"No;" said the little one, curtly. Then, turning to Balthazar, and clutching his skirts, she added:—"I'll come to you; take me on the horse again."

Bellario had purposely said nothing, that he might see what Portia would do of her own accord. She now took a cake and some sweetmeats off the dinner-table and went towards the little stranger, holding them out to her, and said:—"Won't you have some?"

Nerissa looked at Portia for a moment, then took one of the offered sweets, and next held out her rosy mouth, that she might kiss her thanks; but she still maintained her grasp of Balthazar's skirt.

Portia went back to the table for a nectarine, and returning again, stuffed that also into the child's hand, then holding out her own, she said:—"Won't you come with me to cugino?"

The little hand dropped its hold of the attendant's coat, and was given confidingly to this new friend, who led her in a sort of triumph to Bellario.

The acquaintance thus begun, went on prosperously. Nerissa

looked up to Portia as her protectress in all her encounters with her awful aunt; while the encouragement which the little lady of Belmont accorded to her new playmate, was accompanied by a gentle feeling of care and tenderness for one younger and more helpless than herself.

The cheerful temperament of Nerissa caused Bellario to rejoice more than ever at the fortunate chance, which had brought the two children together; for he felt that it acted as an antidote to the too grave society in which his beloved Portia would otherwise have exclusively passed her youth. Now he had the delight of hearing the two merry voices constantly echoing through the halls and woods of Belmont in sportive gladness; and the laugh of Nerissa herself could scarcely ring more clearly and happily than that of his gifted but cheerful-hearted Portia. In playing together, the two children seemed animated by one spirit; but in one point they differed materially. Nerissa was the veriest little dunce that ever was; whilst, on the contrary, Portia's chief delight continued to be the hours she spent with Bellario and his books. She was gay with Nerissa, but she was happy with him.

Bellario was an enthusiast in his profession; and Portia loved to hear him dwell at length upon its attributes, its privileges, its powers, and its value. He would descant upon his favourite theme; and she, well-pleased to listen, would often introduce the subject, and urge and induce him to continue its disquisition.

Time crept on; and the young girl grew almost into the beautiful woman. Her slight childish figure had rounded into graceful proportions; her countenance shone with brighter intelligence; and her voice and manner had acquired a tone of command and dignity well suited to the lady of Belmont. But the profusion of golden locks which waved upon her shoulders, and the unclouded spirits that bounded in her elastic step, and sparkled in her lips and eyes, bespoke her youth, and her happy innocent nature.

It was the morning on which she completed her seventeenth year. She entered the library where Bellario sat, and as she stepped forward to present him with a rare old volume of poetry and a heap of blushing dew-covered flowers which she had just

gathered as a birthday token, she looked so radiant with happiness and beauty, that he involuntarily gazed at her as he would have done at a beautiful vision.

In acknowledging her birthday gift, Bellario told Portia that he had chosen this occasion for the fulfilment of a desire she had expressed, that a band of household musicians might be added to the retainers of Belmont. He said, they had been appointed to come from Venice on this very day, and he felt somewhat surprised that they had not already arrived.

"But we will contrive to spend the day happily, notwithstanding," added he; "we will forego the pleasure of music for one day more; and meantime we will order the horses and take one of our long rambles together. You cannot remember the time, my Portia, when one horse served well for us both, and you needed no other seat than my saddle-bow?"

"It seems as though that and all other particulars of the season when your arms were my only support, even from the very moment when I first was placed a mere infant within them, lived in my memory, as truly as it does in my heart's core," replied she.

That evening, while the two cousins were pacing the moonlit avenue together, Nerissa's blithe voice was heard from the terrace, announcing the arrival of the expected musicians.

"Come in, madam," cried she in high glee, "come in quickly, for the love of laughter! If these same players have as ill-favoured fingers as features, if their instruments yield a sound as coarse as their suits, if they have no better sets of tunes than teeth, or no tones less sharp than their noses, we are like to have but sorry music. But come and see them, and tell me if you have ever seen a more wry-necked, ill-dressed, ugly set of grotesque figures than your ladyship's musicians elect. There is one fellow's crooked nose, puckered eyes, puffed cheeks, and pinched lips, that make him look for all the world like a head on the rainspout of a church."

The girl hurried back, as she spoke; and Bellario leading Portia to the terrace-steps, kissed her hand, and told her he would join her in a few moments to try whether they might not forget the plain persons of the musicians in the music they

played. Meanwhile, he paced the avenue, full of a thought which had that day pressed heavily upon him. His first perception that now his charge was no longer a child, his conviction that she had actually grown into a lovely woman, was accompanied with the thought that he had no right to detain her in solitude. He knew that the heiress of Belmont should now be introduced into a wider circle than she had hitherto known, that she might form her judgment of mankind itself, while she matured and enlarged the store of knowledge she had hitherto reaped from books alone.

"Were her father but here to aid me with his counsel," thought he. "Who so proper to lead her among her fit associates? Who so meet to guide her in a still more important choice? For she will marry—she ought—she must;—so fair, so gifted a creature will one day bless and be blest by a man worthy of her. But how to discover him?"

In a deep reverie, Bellario threw himself upon a low grassy bank that swelled from the turf of the avenue. The bank itself was in the full light of the moon; but it was near to the trees, which cast a deep shadow within a few yards of where he sat.

As the thought of his beloved friend again vibrated through his heart with a passionate yearning, he almost articulated the name of Guido in the deep sigh he breathed.

A sigh still more profound responded to his own. He started up in surprise, that any one should be so near; when a figure emerged from the dark shadow of the trees, and stood mutely before him. Bellario gazed strangely upon the countenance he beheld; for in no lineament of that pale haggard face could he trace any memorial of the youthful image that dwelt in his heart's remembrance.

But when the stranger staggered forward, and muttered huskily "Bellario!" the voice revealed all; and with the rapturous conviction that it was Guido indeed returned, he strained his long-lost friend in his arms, and felt the terrible thirst of years appeased.

A few hasty words sufficed to tell the story of his absence. In the transports of his despair, he had fled from the scenes of

his buried happiness, and had embarked and set sail for the East, where he had dragged on a weary existence, unable to endure the sight of his fellow-men. In latter years the first torture of his grief had yielded to a craving desire to behold his child, which had determined him to brave the torment of revived sorrows, that he might satisfy this burning wish.

"I long, yet dread to see this child," he concluded, with a wild sadness in his manner, "show it to me, give it me, Bellario! Though it killed her, yet it is her child! Where is it, Bellario?"

"She left me but now," replied Bellario calmly, trying to soothe his friend's perturbation; "you think of her as a child, forgetful that seventeen years have elapsed. She is now a beautiful woman; she quitted me but a few moments before I beheld you."

"That fair creature whom you led to the terrace, then, was ——— Gracious heaven! I have seen her! My child! And are you indeed destined to bestow upon me another Portia?"

A strain of music arose at this moment. Solemn, and exquisitely tender was the melody that came wafted towards them upon the night air; it seemed vouchsafed, consolingly ministrant to the wounded spirit of Guido, that his long-pent heart might find relief in the tears which flowed responsive to these appealing sounds.

Bellario hailed the benign influence; but, pointing towards the terrace, he whispered:—"She comes; control your own agitation, my friend, that you may spare hers."

Guido gazed in the direction indicated; he beheld one of the windows that opened on to the ground, thrown back, and a flood of light from the saloon, together with a swelling burst of the harmony, accompanied forth a radiant figure that stepped out upon the terrace, and took its way towards them. The white raiment, the floating golden hair, the graceful mien, the spiritual look, made her seem a seraph sent by pitying Heaven, and Guido stretched forth his arms, as towards a celestial harbinger of happiness.

As she reached the spot where they stood, Bellario took her

hand, and said in his calm impressive voice:—"Does your heart tell you whose is the face you look upon?"

"My father;" she exclaimed; and the parent and child savoured the ineffable transport of a first embrace.

Guido thus restored to them, the happiness of Portia and Bellario seemed now complete; while the Count, in discovering the fruitful source of joy existing for him in the person of his child, wondered how he could have voluntarily remained dead to its enjoyment during that dreary period of self-imposed banishment.

His love for his new-found daughter amounted to idolatry; and in his craving wish to behold her unceasingly, to enjoy her presence exclusively, he would fain have engrossed her thoughts as she absorbed his, and he almost jealously beheld her attention directed to any other object but himself.

Bellario noted the struggle existing in his friend's mind, and well knew how to deal tenderly with such a mood of affection. Accordingly he determined to quit them for a time, that the father and daughter might be thrown solely upon each other's resources, and, might thus learn to find their mutual happiness in one another alone.

A cause imperatively requiring his personal presence formed sufficient pretext for his absence; he left Belmont, and retired to Padua, where he had the delight of learning from Portia the complete success of his scheme.

Guido's confidence in the love existing between his daughter and himself soon acquired firmness, and as his faith in her love became assured, he called to mind what Bellario had said respecting her introduction in life, and he accordingly consulted with her upon the appointment of a day when he should invite all the families with whom his own had formerly held intercourse, to meet at Belmont in celebration of his return and thus to renew those connections which had been broken by his absence.

And now the thought of this approaching festival engaged every member of the household, that due splendour might preside in all its arrangements to do honour to two such interesting occasions, as the return of Count Guido to his patrimony of

Belmont, and the presentation of his beautiful daughter to the ancient friends of the family. Bellario was entreated to be present, that he might lend weight and honour to the reception of the guests by the illustrious and learned reputation of his name.

This tender friend himself eagerly seized this occasion of beholding his Portia's first entrance upon the arena of life.

His love for her was no less ardent than her father's; and it was with almost equal pride and delight therefore, that these two loving guardians beheld the object of their tenderest thoughts fulfil all that even they could have anticipated of excellence in her own person, while she won universal homage from those around. The ladies commended her modest dignity and self-possession; the noblemen congratulated the happy father of so fair and accomplished a maiden; and the young gallants vied with each other in endeavours to attract her regard.

Among these latter, the foremost was the Marquis of Montferrat. He at once placed himself among the rank of her avowed admirers; and from the marked courtesy of the reception with which her father had welcomed him, he seemed to have already gained a priority of claim above his fellows. Of this superiority he seemed fully conscious, from the air of triumph that sparkled in his eyes when he addressed her.

Nerissa, who leaned upon the back of her lady's seat (which was in one of the alcoves in the grounds, and formed a sort of sylvan throne for her), found early occasion to whisper:—"Your father's report of the handsome looks of his friend, is as false as his estimation of his other qualities. The Marquis is scarce better looking than your ladyship's musicians; who, like their brethren, the singing birds, have the plainer exterior, the better their song. There is one among the company, who surpasses him in good looks a hundredfold, to my thinking; the young cavalier in the murrey doublet, yonder, who is listening to something that the Marquis is telling. Do you see him whom I mean, Madam?"

Portia answered not, but Nerissa could see that her mistress had distinguished the gentleman, for she was looking steadily upon his face.

Nerissa tripped away to try and learn who he was; and soon heard that he was the Lord Bassanio, one of the friends and associates of the Marquis of Montferrat.

"They are two foolish young men," continued her informant, "they try who can spend their money fastest and least wisely. Even the princely fortune which the Marquis inherited from his worthy father, is speedily dwindling; and as for the young Lord Bassanio, it is whispered that he must shortly be ruined by such extravagance as he indulges in, to please this friend of his, whom he emulates in all his follies though not in his vices. Bassanio bears an unblemished reputation for honour and integrity, while the Marquis——"

The old gentleman paused, and Nerissa could extract no further information from him, respecting the objects of her curiosity.

Before he quitted Belmont, Bellario took occasion to speak to his friend upon the subject of this new acquaintance the Marquis of Montferrat.

"He is to be here again in a few days by my invitation;" replied Guido. "I asked him to spend some time with us. He is the scion of a most noble and honourable family, and he himself is an accomplished and right gallant gentleman: if he be all he seems, he would form no unfitting match, even for our Portia."

"He must be worthy indeed, who deserves her;" was all Bellario's reply; for he resolved to say no more, till he could speak with better knowledge. He therefore took his departure, determined to lose no time in obtaining accurate information relative to the character and habits of the Marquis of Montferrat.

Belmont had scarcely time to recover its wonted serenity of aspect, after the late festival, when the young Marquis and his train returned, and by their arrival again thronged its tranquil precincts with gay equipages, horses, hounds, hawks, and troops of liveried attendants.

The increasing scorn with which Portia treated the distasteful assiduity of the Marquis, struck her father as being beyond the gay disdain which ladies are sometimes accustomed to affect

towards their wooers; and he was one evening walking in the avenue, his thoughts employed with this subject, when a messenger approached at a smart gallop, and seeing the Count, placed a letter in his hands, and rode on.

Guido read as follows :—

"Dear friend and brother,

"I possess undoubted proofs that the Marquis is a notorious and confirmed gambler, and an unscrupulous libertine. Until I can myself bring you these proofs, believe that this accusation is not made lightly, or without sufficient warrant. Suffer not such a presence longer to sully the pure atmosphere of Belmont; nor let a too late heed of my intelligence injure our Portia to the latest term of her life.

"Your faithfully devoted

"BELLARIO."

Count Guido remained in bitter reverie. "So much for my perspicacity," thought he, "in judging of the qualities of the man I chose for a friend, and whom I might have gone on to wish should be my son-in-law,—my Portia's husband! Little has my own poor judgment bested me in my course through life. Better to refer all things to chance, even things of greatest moment, than decide them by so erring, so worthless a guide, as judgment of mine."

He lingered in such dark thoughts of self-reproach, until at length his daughter came to seek him, wooing him to return with her to the house, lest too late wandering beneath the trees in the night air should injure his health, which had never been strong since the period of his absence.

He was perfectly aware of his own declining state; but his chief anxiety was to prevent it from being perceived by his daughter; he carefully withheld from her his sleepless nights, and the constant fever that consumed him.

In order the more effectually to do this, he made a strong effort to carry out a resolution he had for some time entertained, of taking her himself to Venice, to introduce her to several families of distinction there.

He felt that this would afford him an opportunity of accom-

plishing a project which had occurred to him in that self-communing he had lately held with regard to chance and judgment. Impetuous ever, in his nature, his sensitive conscience had lately yielded to rash fancies, and he now conceived a scheme as eccentric in its aim, as his former exercise of judgment had been hasty and defective.

He determined that while he was in Venice he would order to be constructed three caskets, severally made of gold, silver, and lead; and that on the choice of these caskets should rest a decision of dearest moment. In one of them he resolved to enclose the portrait of his daughter, and whosoever of her suitors should choose the casket containing her picture, should be her appointed husband.

An early day was appointed for their departure from Belmont. Their noble friends vied with each other, who best should contribute to render the welcome of the Count di Belmonte and his daughter gay and attractive. Each day some new pastime was proposed; some gay masking, some day-light excursion, or nightly revelry.

On one occasion, the grand canal presented a scene of unsurpassed brilliancy and animation; a boat-race was to take place, and all Venice thronged to behold the issue of the contention. Boats of all sizes and descriptions crowded hither; craft of every kind pushed and jostled; gondolas glided to and fro; boatmen shouted and called; gaily-dressed ladies and gallants smiled and flirted; draperies of every vivid colour depended from windows; balconies were filled with gazers; steps and doorways, like the entrances to bee-hives, supported their clusters, and swarmed with living creatures.

On the prow of a gaily decorated vessel, there reclined a young Venetian, who was remarkable, even among so much surrounding brightness, for the splendour of his dress, the costliness of his boat-decorations, and the whimsicality of his men's attire. As one in the procession of boats which glided idly backwards and forwards in mid-stream before the race began, his vessel passed and repassed the galley in which the Count di Belmonte and his daughter sat with their friends to behold the pageant; and in the figure of this young gallant, Portia

recognized the gentleman pointed out by Nerissa among the company at the Belmont festival as being so superlatively handsome.

She was so intently watching his return, that she paid little heed to an old lady, who was endeavouring to entertain her with a description of the various persons she recognized. "Yonder is Signor Luigi and his three fair daughters," said the old lady; "they are saluting that grave gentleman in the sober suit, who is no less a personage than Signor Antonio, whom my lord calls the 'royal merchant.' They say he is very generous to poor struggling tradesmen, and tender to unfortunate debtors. Moreover he has good blood in his veins, and is of gentle birth. There goes that pleasant scapegrace, Signor Gratiano; and in the farther boat is young Signor Lorenzo, with two of his friends. Yonder is the galley of his highness the prince of Morocco, who has lately arrived in this city with his train, and who, I understand, is so courteous and pleasant-spoken, that you forget he is black. But for my part, I can't fancy a black man could be so agreeable as a white man; I own I have prejudices, and that's one of mine,—I hate people of colour. Talking of prejudices, there's that detestable old jew! How dare he come among us, I should like to know? But that's one of the drawbacks on such an occasion as this. A paltry trafficker may elbow a magnifico, or a jew usurer associate with us christians! They say the villanous dog has a pretty black-eyed daughter whom he keeps shut up in his miserable den of a house, instead of bringing the poor thing out to have a peep at such a sight as this! Ah, here comes young Lord Bassanio again; he is a true gentleman; and my lord says, a brave soldier, and an excellent scholar. I am sorry to hear that he is ruining his fortune with the extravagant course he is running. Why, the equipment of that vessel, I should say, never cost him less than——"

What the gossip-loving old lady might have gone on farther to say, Portia knew not, for at this moment, her father leaned forward to accost the young gentleman, who, seeing who spoke to him, recognized the Count with a respectful earnestness. As the young man stood there with his hat courteously removed,

and his attitude full of grace and deference, replying to her father's salutation, Portia thought Nerissa's estimate was certainly correct; and when a moment after, the young Venetian happened to raise his eyes to hers, he found them fixed upon him with the complacency inspired by such a thought. Several times again in the course of the day he met that look; and when at the conclusion of the race, he retired from the contention as one of the losers, he felt consoled by the sympathetic glance of interest that once more flashed upon him from those expressive eyes. A thought for the first time thrilled through the heart of Bassanio, that had he not injured his fortune by a hitherto spendthrift course, he might have aspired to obtain a far more glorious prize than the one awarded to the winning boat.

"What if I consult with my friend and kinsman, Antonio, upon the means of repairing my fortunes," thought he. "Even were I to entreat of his generosity to bestow upon me a fitting sum to equip me for entering the lists that I might contend for her favour—his kindness hath that extent, I am certain. I will think of it; meantime, I vow to undertake a pilgrimage to Belmont, at some not very distant day."

After a gay and pleasant interval spent at Venice, the father and daughter prepared to return; and Portia had the satisfaction of remarking that the change seemed to have been beneficial to her father. As they proceeded homewards, the Count spoke playfully with his daughter of their late scenes of gaiety; and in his sprightly tone and cheerful glance, Portia read more healthful symptoms than she had noted for many a day.

"And of all those stores of splendour, I have brought you away no richer token than this slight bauble," said he, placing a ruby ring upon her finger, "but it will serve to remind my Portia of a pleasant holiday with her loving father; and such thoughts I know she prizes above jewels the most rare and precious that might be found in all Venice."

His daughter kissed it fondly, as well as the hand that placed it on hers, and said:—"It shall never quit my finger, dear father."

"Nay, you shall give it some day to him who shall possess the hand itself—to your husband, my Portia." And the father unconsciously sighed, pressed the hand that lay in his, and looked proudly into the beaming countenance that was raised to his.

Some days later Portia was sitting by her father's side in the library, reading to him from one of his favourite volumes, when she suddenly felt his hand, in which hers was locked, twitch convulsively, while his head, a moment afterwards, dropped powerless upon the back of the chair in which he sat. She leaned towards him—he was speechless; but he gave her one of those mute yet eloquent looks, in which the soul speaks through the eyes.

She gazed into those speaking eyes which seemed striving to convey some injunction to her, that she might try to read their meaning; and she once saw him attempt to raise his other hand, as if in the languid endeavour to make some signal, but she could not divine its import.

She whispered words of tenderness, beseeching him not to exhaust his strength by such efforts, while she continued to bathe his temples, and attempted to summon help.

At length she heard a sound, at once discordant with her present feelings, and welcome from its assurance of aid—Nerissa's merry laugh! Clearly and imperatively Portia called. Nerissa hastened towards her lady's voice; but the mirthful look and tone with which she entered, were stricken into dismay by what she beheld.

Portia, by a steadfast effort, controlled her emotion, while she desired Nerissa to speed for Balthazar and other attendants, to despatch a messenger for medical assistance, and another to Padua to summon Bellario to Belmont.

"If we could but get my lord to lie down, Madam," whispered the weeping Balthazar, "I feel sure that he would be easier. My lord the Count had one of these seizures before—a night or two before you went to Venice; but he would not permit your ladyship to be informed of it, because it went off by the dawn of morning, and he said it was nothing, and you should not be made uneasy about such a trifle."

Portia repressed the bitter words that arose to her lips, with which she felt inclined to reprove Balthazar for having concealed from her so vital a secret; but she would not permit herself to give one thought to regret, while she could devote them to the present succour of her father. She knelt by his side, and murmured softly :—"Will my father try if lying down may relieve him?"

There was a look of acquiescence.

But when Balthazar and another attendant advanced to support him away, the same expression of denial crossed his features as before.

"Will you not let us place you in bed, dearest father?"

The expression remained unchanged.

"We think if you were reclining, it would be a better position than as you are now, dear father. Will you not try to lie down?"

His eyes resumed their eager look.

"I think my father objects to remove from this room, Balthazar, and that he would lie down, if a couch were made for him here." Portia fixed her eyes upon her father's, as she uttered these words, and perceived that she had interpreted his wishes aright.

The attendants speedily arranged one of the library couches for the reception of the Count, and they laid him softly down in a recumbent position; his daughter still with her hand fast locked in his, which could not unclench its grasp.

She struggled hard with terrible fear, and dropped softly to her knees by her father's side that she might beseech strength and comfort of her Father in Heaven. As she knelt meekly there, she felt the hand that still held hers slightly relax its grasp; and a moment afterwards, that deep tender tone she knew so well, and which she had almost despaired of ever hearing again, murmured the words :—"My Portia!"

She arose hastily but quietly, and bent over the couch.

"Are we alone, my Portia?" he said.

"We are alone now, dearest father;" said she.

"I have no moment to lose;" said the Count. "This interval of speech and strength is mercifully lent to me, but it may not

last long, and I dread lest I once more behold myself reduced to my late torture of impotency in speech and action, while so much remains to be said and done for the welfare of my Portia."

He proceeded with an eagerness that partook of his old spirit:—"Unlock yonder cabinet, my Portia, and bring me the three caskets, with the fold of sealed parchment which you will find beside them."

She obeyed his directions.

"Tell me what words are engraved upon the lid of each of these caskets, my Portia."

"Upon the golden one is inscribed, 'Who chooseth me, shall gain what many men desire;' upon the silver one, 'Who chooseth me, shall get as much as he deserves;' and upon the leaden one, 'Who chooseth me, must give and hazard all he hath;'" replied she.

"By this parchment deed, which is a will I executed when in Venice, my child, I have provided that on the choice of these caskets shall depend your destiny in marriage. In one of these caskets is locked your picture; you will find the three corresponding keys of gold, silver, and lead, in the right-hand drawer of the cabinet. Of these keys take charge yourself; you will find specified in the will, on what occasions you are to deliver them up. Yes," continued he, as if to himself, and with a wild earnestness that lighted his fast-dimming eyes, and lent a momentary energy to his half-extinct voice, "I have learned to think that thus chance and judgment may be made to aid each other, and wisely combine to decide what else might never justly be awarded. 'Tis for your sake, my Portia; 'tis best thus, believe it. Will you give me your promise? Do you pledge your word to dispose of yourself according to the plan set forth in my will?"

"I vow solemnly to obey your will in all things, my father;" exclaimed Portia.

A serene peace dwelt upon his features at her words, and he feebly stretched his arms towards her. She flung herself upon the bed beside him, and tenderly straining him in the embrace he sought, she heard him murmur:—"Now happily I go to await with *her*, the future coming of our child—our Portia."

When Balthazar came in with the doctors, they found the father and daughter clasped thus in each other's arms; both profoundly still. But the daughter's was the stillness of a death-like swoon—the father's, that of death itself!

When Portia recovered from the fainting-fit in which her senses lay steeped, the first object that met her eyes was Bellario. That dear and tender friend was there watching over her, to lighten her grief by sharing it, to console her by his sympathy, and to strengthen her by his help.

In his society she learned to encounter the blow which had befallen her, to endure the daily sense of her bereavement, and, in time, to convert its remembrance into a source of hallowed memories rather than of bitter regrets.

When, after more than a twelvemonth of mourning had elapsed, Bellario announced to her that he thought it now behoved her to throw open the gates of Belmont for the advent of visitors, she, with her usual good sense and dignity, sought not to delay an inevitable consequence; but told him that however she might have of herself desired to live still to themselves, she yet perceived the wisdom of his counsel, and was prepared to conform to his suggestion.

"And that you may now appear in your true and exclusive right as mistress of Belmont, my Portia," said he, "I shall now withdraw myself to my quiet bachelor house at Padua, and leave you to receive these visitors, unsupported, save by your own dignity and noble discretion. It will be wiser for you to accustom yourself henceforth to rely firmly upon your own conduct, my Portia, and to relinquish the society of one, who, though most dear to you, I know, is yet one to whom you have been habituated to look for counsel and assistance. For these you may still apply, by letter. Fail not to inform me of yourself constantly, and above all, to send for my help whenever it may avail you in aught of emergency. You know, my Portia, that I have never flattered you. But I have discerned your merits, and honestly tell you that they serve to make you one of the noblest and worthiest of your sex. You have reached an age when a woman is at her most attractive period of life. You have youth, beauty, wealth, virtue, native intellect, a cultivated

understanding, and a generous, innocent, happy heart. Your intellectual accomplishments will draw the accusation of pedantry and unfeminine pre-eminence, from the ignorant and consciously-inferior alone, among men; when it is seen how modestly and wisely you exercise your faculties. God bless and protect you, my dearest Portia; omit not to write of all you think, say, or do, to your own true Bellario."

Thus proudly confiding did Bellario quit her; and it required all Portia's judgment and prudence to bid her acquiesce in a measure which deprived her of so beloved a friend.

In less than a week after his departure, Belmont was once more thronged with visitors. Not only the nobles and magnificos of Venice crowded to offer their congratulations to their fair friend, the heiress of Belmont; but suitors of every country, renowned in fame, and illustrious in birth, poured from all quarters, and sought the adventure of the caskets, contesting for the glorious prize therein at issue.

As the successive competitors tried their fate, and withdrew, one after the other equally unprosperous in his selection, Portia half unconsciously indulged a thought that the right choice might perhaps be reserved for one whom she could prefer. But she would now and then playfully complain to Nerissa of the waywardness of her fate, which placed her disposal at the mercy of a lottery. Nerissa would laughingly attempt to console her by assurances that she would make her own marriage depend on the same chance.

"I know," said she, "that whenever I may think of a husband, I shall make a quick choice; and, who knows? perhaps when the right suitor to your ladyship shall select the right casket, the right lover for me may present himself at the right same moment, and so the rites of marriage may give both the gallants a right over us at once from that day forward, and everything may end rightly and happily after all."

Bassanio, like every one else, had heard of the heiress of Belmont; of the adventure of the caskets, and of how it was to decide of her disposal in marriage. His former thought recurred; and he now resolved that he would seek assistance of his friend Antonio, and would try his fate at Belmont, where he

would commence his suit to Portia by a frank disclosure of the state of his ruined fortunes, and his desire to owe all things to her bounty and her love—could he once obtain confirmation of his hope that he was not wholly indifferent to her.

Bassanio's spendthrift course had been rather the result of youth than arisen from a native tendency to extravagance. He was possessed of high qualities, as well as of a handsome person. His love for his friend Antonio was warm and sincere; and the sense he entertained of the many benefits he had received at the hands of this munificent kinsman took the shape of gratitude and indestructible attachment. He had also an exalted sense of honour, and entertained an utter scorn of falsehood in word or deed.

But to return to Belmont—to Portia—to Nerissa.

One day, when there had been as usual a numerous arrival of suitors during the preceding week, and there were then abiding in the house no fewer than six gentlemen,—a Neapolitan prince, a County Palatine, a French lord, an English baron, a Scotch earl, and a German duke's nephew,—all attracted hither by the fame of the rich heiress, Portia and Nerissa sat at their embroidery frame in the library. Portia loved this room for the sake of her father, whom she had here beheld for the last time, and for the sake of Bellario, with whom she had here spent some of the happiest hours of her existence. She made it her own peculiar sitting-room, therefore; and here she sat on the morning in question, chatting gaily with Nerissa in their usual free, pleasant, light-hearted manner.

And so, in the pretended pouting of a favourite of fortune, Portia said:—"*By my troth, Nerissa, my little body is aweary of this great world.*"

MERCHANT OF VENICE, Act i. sc. 2.

TALE II.

THE THANE'S DAUGHTER.

THE night-wind howled and swept over the heathy plains that surrounded the castle. It drove on shriekingly; then paused; and then the sharp lashings of the rain-storm pelted onward before its fierce will. The distant hills were hung with mist; and when the flashes of lightning darted a momentary glare upon all around, they served but to illumine the dense dank veil that shrouded castle, hill, and valley.

Dismally and wailingly the gust panted on, lamenting.

Round the walls and battlements of the castle, it beat, and tore, and raved; the rain whirled its sheeted drifts against the stony security, as if mad with impotent endeavours to penetrate the building, and whelm all beneath its washing inundation; the lightning darted fiery threats amid turret and tower, in vivid, sudden, quick-succeeding flashes; while the deep-rolling thunder mingled its awful menaces with the howls and complainings of the wind. The wrath of nature seemed striving to find voice in the tumult of the vengeful elements; as these storm-ministers still beat, and tore, and raved round the castle walls.

For within these walls—in one of the upper chambers of the castle—that night a child was born into the world, destined to read a world-wide lesson, how unhallowed desires and towering ambition can deface the image of virtue in a human heart, and teach it to spurn and outrage the dictates of nature herself.

On her couch lay the thane's lady. Her eyes were closed —but she did not sleep. The lids veiled them, but beneath

the lids the restless eye-balls quivered, and the fringed lashes were not still; while the pale lips trembled and twitched with emotion that was strong and wakeful.

Bethoc, the aged nurse, hovered near her mistress, mutely sympathizing with the thoughts which she knew agitated her heart, and caused those sleepless eyes to quiver and tremble.

The dark eyes open, and meet those of the aged nurse. They are eager, and fraught with solicitude and enquiry of somewhat the lips dare not frame into a question.

Bethoc answers the look—"I will bring the babe, and lay her to your breast, my lady."

"Dare not to say '*her!*'"

"Madam, the bairn's just a lassie; I'd ha' told ye of a man-child, if I could."

A groan burst from the lips of the sick lady; and the teeth were ground, with what sounded a curse!

The storm had subsided; and for many hours the sky had been clear and bright. It was high morning.

The old thane entered; and bending over his wife in a transport of honest tenderness, he kissed her forehead, and whispered his joy to see her safe, his proud delight at the thought of the child she had brought him—his thanks—his happiness.

The lady turned her large full eyes upon him, with a look of wonder.

"Do you know it is a girl?" she asked.

"Surely;" replied her husband. "Dear little creature, she is sent by Heaven to make my age happy, and to comfort her mother when she has laid her old Kenneth in the grave." But as these words of pious thanksgiving breathed from her husband's lips, the thane's lady sank back—a corpse.

The thane pressed the motherless infant to his bosom, and raised his eyes reverently to the Creator, from whose presence the newly-born one seemed but recently come, and prayed that maturity might not sully the pristine whiteness of its innocence.

The infant, though thus early deprived of her mother, throve under the fostering care of a doting nurse and ministering

attendants; but, as soon as she was able to run about by herself, the little girl found means of evading the nurse's wish to retain her constantly within her own supervision; and she would stray from the women's range of apartments, finding her way all over the castle.

Sometimes she would seek out her father, and take pleasure in seeing the smile that always lighted up his venerable face at the sight of hers, so bright in its youthful beauty.

And yet there was a latent expression, a something antagonistic, in the clear beauty of that fair child. Surpassingly handsome she was; but yet a look there was in those blue eyes, that marred their loveliness of shape and colour. In the mouth, too, round those full and rubious lips, and amid those exquisite dimples, there played certain lines that presented indications of will and unfeminine inflexibility, which might have produced sensations of repulsive surmise to one accustomed to seek charm in expression rather than in linear beauty.

But among those by whom she was surrounded, there were no such fastidious analyzers. Her fond father dwelt with rapture upon the face of his little girl, and found naught there but loveliness; and she, gratified with praise, would often come to him that she might enjoy that which he so profusely lavished upon her. But sated with adulation, and accustomed to indulgence, she soon tired of so monotonous an amusement, and she lingered less and less by her old father's side, and strayed farther and oftener in search of more congenial entertainment than his quiet voice, and approving looks could afford.

She loved to watch the men-at-arms in the court-yard, practising their management of their different weapons, and she would note with unwearied interest the dexterity and skill of the retainers in these warlike sports and exercises.

There was one man she remarked who was peculiarly skilful. He was a tall, stalwart fellow, singularly uncouth and ugly, with wild shaggy hair, and a ferocious look. His name was Grym. But he uniformly surpassed all his companions in adroitness, and success in his feats of arms. So to this ill-favoured, but triumphant giant, did the child take a strong

fancy, and he became a sort of hero, a favourite rallying point for all her wishes and interest in the scene of contention.

Once, when there arose a dispute as to which arrow had flown the best, and hit the nearest to the centre of the target, several voices contending clamorously for the rival claims of the two most successful bowmen—Grym and Ivan,—the little girl suddenly sprang forward loudly and eagerly declaring that Grym was the victor.

"Don't you see! Don't you see!" she exclaimed, pointing up to the mark, which was high above her head; "That's his shaft! Right in the clout!"

"I'll lift you up, my young lady," said one of the men; "and you'll then see that Ivan's arrow is just a point nighest."

"Let Grym lift me up! Here Grym! Take me up! Hold me fast! Here, don't you see, all of you," shouted the child in all the excitement of proving her words, and awarding the victory to her hero; while with one hand she clung round the neck of the savage-looking archer, and with the other pointed triumphantly to the spot where his arrow rested:—"Don't you all see that Grym's is the best shaft?"

The child's excitement communicated itself to the men, and they one and all shouted—Ivan and his partizans as eagerly as any—"Grym's is the best! Grym is conquerer!"

From that day Grym was the avowed favourite and playmate of the little lady Gruoch; and it was strange to see the fair child, a thing of smiles, and beauty, and grace, take a fancy to that grisly man-at-arms, and cling round his great bull-neck, and nestle within his huge stalwart arms, and make him carry her about from place to place to show her all the curiosities of drawbridge, portcullis, and moat, donjonkeep, and fortalice, tower and battlement, platform and rampart, embrazure and loop-hole, outwork, barbican, postern-gate, turret, and buttressed wall; all the curious places about a strongly defended castle, that possessed so wondrous an interest for an inquisitive and restless child.

There was a wood in the vicinity of the castle of Moray, where the little lady Gruoch loved to wander. She would make Grym

carry her thither, of a bright spring or summer morning; and here she would play about, attended only by her gaunt favourite, and the young page Culen, who, with a boy's sagacity in finding out what he liked, and in securing it when found out, always contrived to be of the party, when he saw Grym, with the little lady in his arms, take the path to the wood. Culen soon ingratiated himself with his young lady-mistress, by a thousand ingenious devices. Now he would bring her a rustic crown and sceptre, woven skilfully of rushes from the margin of the lake; anon, heaps of wild flowers to adorn her mossy throne in the wood; another time, feathers from the eagle's wing, or the jay's, which he would deftly form into a sylvan fan for her; and sometimes he would thread scarlet berries into chains and bracelets to hang around her neck and arms, and twine amid her bright gold hair.

These boyish offerings were graciously accepted by the little lady, who grew to take pleasure in seeing the page constantly form one in the association that had grown between herself and Grym—but she always treated Culen as a vassal and an inferior, while to Grym she behaved familiarly and almost fondly, as one in whom she recognized that which she could admire and respect.

And truly there was that in the uncouth Grym which might command both admiration and respect. He was spare and curt in words; but his heart overflowed with honest good-meaning. His bearing was ungain, his features were harsh, and his countenance was forbidding; but he would not have hurt a fly, and he was incapable of an ungenerous thought or a mean action.

He was keenly sensible of the fancy the beautiful child, Gruoch, had taken to him, ugly as he was; and his attachment towards his young mistress was profound and devoted.

It was like a potent spell, the hold which the young beauty had upon the affections of those around her. The old thane, her father; Bethoc, the aged nurse; Grym, the brave man-at-arms; Culen, the young page; all doted upon her very footsteps, and yielded implicitly to the fascination which she exercised over their feelings. It seemed impossible to behold that fair brilliant

being, and not worship the image of triumphant beauty she presented. Her very habit of command seemed to heighten her charms, and imperatively to claim homage, admiration, and regard.

She was one day straying in the wood, attended only by Grym, when, on approaching the rustic seat of moss which she was accustomed to occupy as her sylvan throne, Gruoch perceived a figure seated there. It was that of a Highlander. He seemed faint and way-worn, and drooped his head forward upon his hands, so that his face was hidden from them as they approached. At first Gruoch bade Grym go and bid the man retire from the seat which was hers—her throne; but noting his weary and dejected attitude, she added:—"Stay, the man seems tired; let him come to the castle for rest and refreshment."

The Highlander raised his head slowly. "There is death in the castle!" he exclaimed solemnly.

Then steadily regarding the lady Gruoch for a few seconds, he added:—"What is it I trace on that fair young brow? But such weird shall not be read by me for one that has just proffered rest and refreshment." And he sank into his former attitude.

"Go, Grym, and assist him to rise;" said the little girl. "What does he mean? Is he sick?"

The page came up at the moment, and Grym despatched him for some of his fellows, that they might come to the stranger's assistance, and support him to the castle.

"Take me home, Grym," whispered little Gruoch. "Take me up in your arms, I want to hold by you. I don't like him! Take me away!"

Grym felt the child tremble, as he lifted her up in his arms, and bore her from the spot.

"What did he mean by 'death in the castle,' Grym?" whispered she.

Grym only shook his head.

"Speak, Grym—you must speak—I want to hear your voice," said the child, grasping his shaggy hair, and pulling his face round towards her own. "Look at me, and tell me, Grym!"

"God grant it be not second-sight! Some of these Highlanders have the gift," muttered Grym.

"What do you mean? 'Second-sight!' I don't know what you mean, now, Grym. Speak, speak!" And the little lady tugged and pulled at the shaggy locks, in the vehemence of her eagerness to urge the taciturn Grym to explain.

"We shall known soon enough, when we reach the castle;" said he.

Gruoch said no more, for she had fallen into a fit of thought. She could not help dreading that something fatal had happened to her father.

She had scarcely crossed the drawbridge and court-yard of the castle, than she threw herself out of Grym's arms, and rushed into the hall where her father usually sat, surrounded by his dogs, near the hearth. There in his wonted place she found him; and with a warmth of gratitude and love that had never before swelled her heart, she flung herself into his arms, weeping and sobbing upon his breast, while she hugged him passionately and repeatedly.

Surprised and alarmed at the violence of her emotion, the old thane enquired what had happened to terrify his darling.

Grym stepped forward to relate the encounter in the wood, and her father desired some one to go and fetch Bethoc, that she might soothe and comfort her young mistress; then bethinking himself, he added:—"No, no, not Bethoc! Let some one go and bid Eoda and Lula come for their young lady."

Soon after Gruoch had been led away by her women, she learned that the reason Bethoc had not been summoned to her aid, was, that the poor old nurse had been seized with sudden paralysis that morning, and had expired not half an hour before her young mistress returned to the castle.

"Then hers was the death predicted!" thought Gruoch. And in the relief of finding it was not her father's, that of the faithful Bethoc was comparatively unfelt.

When those of the household who had been summoned by Culen to the assistance of the Highlander, reached the wood, they found no trace of him. He had departed—vanished from the spot.

A year or two passed away; and for somewhile after Bethoc's

death, Gruoch's interest and attention were drawn towards her old father in a degree that they had never been before. She would sit at her father's feet, and gaze up into his face, and wonder how it should be, that with the strong attachment which she felt for him—an attachment that had caused her to start with terror from the possibility of losing him—still that there should be withal so little of delight in their being together. And yet that mild face! That snow-white hair! Surely she felt very fondly, very pitifully towards so much meekness and softness? Yes, she did. But it was that very pity that prevented the fulness of a daughter's love.

One evening as she sat on a low stool at his feet, gazing as usual into his face, she remembered what Bethoc had told her of her mother's regret that there should have been so little of martial ardour in his nature, so total an absence of ambition, of thirst for advancement of any kind.

Her pity for such infirmity almost assumed the poignancy of contempt. "Where sufferings are so passive," thought she, "what wonder that the heel of the tyrant crushes?" She thought upon the shame of seeing the wealth of a noble house mulcted to feed the royal avarice (for Malcolm II, the then reigning king, had grown grasping in his old age, and oppressed his nobles with incessant severity); she thought upon the bitter degradation of claims unmaintained, of extortions tamely submitted to, of injustice unresisted and unresented, until her eyes sparkled and her cheeks glowed with the burning thoughts that possessed her. Her father happened to look upon her upturned face at this moment, and started at the images he beheld of the brooding wrath and vengeance that rankled at her heart, and cast their reflex upon her countenance.

"What's the matter, my darling?" he exclaimed. "Don't look in that way, darling." And the old thane passed his hand over his child's beautiful face, as if to remove the terrible look that marred its loveliness.

Gruoch held down her head, and thought within herself.

"He does not care for anything. He does not care to talk to me. He is contented to sit there quietly, hardly looking at me, with his hand upon my head." She half withdrew it from be-

neath his touch, with a suppressed sound of annoyance. "He strokes my hair, and pats my head, just as he caresses his hounds. I wonder whether he loves me better than one of those dogs?"

After a time, when the train of her reflections had a little softened, she looked up again towards her father's face. It was serene as usual, and the eyes were closed. He had fallen asleep quietly, with his hand upon his child's fair head; there was a look of holy benignity in his aspect, which touched her, as the thought crossed her mind that it was mercifully sleep, and not death, which she gazed upon.

"Kind old father!" she muttered. "He *does* love me; and I love him!"

And Gruoch stepped softly on to the little stool from which she had risen, and kissed the face of her father as he slept.

But gradually the old restlessness returned; and Gruoch found the constant companionship of her parent as irksome as ever. She renewed her association with Grym, and learned to add new amusements to those she had formerly found in company with her ungain favourite, and the young page, Culen.

Once she and Grym were practising with bow and arrows at a mark, that had been set up at one end of the long platform on the ramparts of the castle, which adjoined the women's range of apartments. She was just in the act of fixing a fresh shaft, and preparing to take aim again, when her eye caught sight of the page, who approached along the range of platform, tossing lightly up and down something which he held in his hand, and which was gay and parti-coloured.

"What is that, Culen? A ball! And how light, and how well-made! Is it for me?"

"Yes, my lady, it is for you. I made it, hoping you would like to have it."

"It is very handsome! Thank you, Culen; I like it very much. How well you have made it! How bright the colours are! And how well it flies!"

She continued for some minutes tossing up the ball, and watching the flying gay colours; while the page stood by, to

look upon the bright beautiful face, the graceful form that bounded to and fro in agile pursuit.

When she ceased for a moment, Culen said :—"I have something else to show you, that I think will please your ladyship ; I found it out yesterday. There are plenty about the castle heights; but this one is so near that you can see right into it, and watch the birds."

The page stepped upon a stone ledge which formed a kind of seat in a recess of the battlemented outer wall that skirted the platform ; and signed to his young mistress that she should silently follow his example, and peep over. She climbed up by his side; and looked over the ridge of the wall, in the direction of his finger. Upon a slight jutting point, a pair of martlets had built their nest; and the young lady and the page could see the callow nestlings with their gaping mouths ; they could watch the parent birds take short wheeling flights, and return to hover at the opening of the nest, and supply their young ones with food.

For some time Gruoch continued to watch this pretty sight with interest ; then she stepped down from the stone seat, and began to toss her ball again. Suddenly it swerved in its upward flight, and fell just beyond the wall.

The page sprang to the spot he had just quitted, and exclaimed :—"I see it ! It has lodged just below the nest ! Look ! On that frieze just beneath !"

"I see it ! I see it !" cried Gruoch, who had stepped up again by his side. "It looks quite near ! What a pity we can't reach it ! O my beautiful ball !"

"If I had but a ledge ever so small to set my foot upon, I could get it ; I know I could !" exclaimed Culen. "It's quite close, I could be over in a moment !"

"Would you venture ?" said his young mistress, looking at him approvingly.

"That I would ! I could get it in an instant, if I had but a spot to step my foot upon—ever such a point would do ! If the martlet's nest were not there, now, that would be quite room enough !"

"But we can soon dislodge the nest, if that's all !" exclaimed

Gruoch. "Here's one of Grym's long shafts—that'll do exactly to poke it off with."

"Oh no!" said the page hastily.

"Are you afraid?" said she, looking at him abruptly.

"No, not that; but I don't like—I can't push the nest off," said Culen.

"Then I will! Give me the arrow!" she exclaimed.

Gruoch leaned over the edge; fixed the point of the arrow into the caked mud and earth which fastened the nest to the jutting point; loosened it; raised it; and in another moment, the martlet's home with its unfledged tenants, spun whirling through the air, and was scattered to pieces, striking against the buttresses and rough-hewn walls. She stayed not to note its career, but turned to the page.

"Now, Culen! It was a brave offer! Have you courage? I will hold your hand firm! Give it me."

The page seized the beautiful little hand that was held out to him, and taking the arrow in the other, that he might reach and secure the soft ball with it, he climbed over the edge of the outer wall, which was narrower there, on account of the deep recess that was made in its thickness, and formed the ledge on which they stood.

But when he set his foot upon the jutting point which had lately held the nest, and then planted the other foot on the same spot, and after that, carefully stooped down, and stretched his arm out, so as to stick the arrow into the ball,—he had no sooner effected this, than he suddenly felt his head reel, and his eyes swim at the unaccustomed height over which he hung suspended, merely sustained by that frail support.

Gruoch felt the spasmodic twitch that these sensations communicated to the hand she grasped.

"Keep firm, Culen! Hold fast my hand! I have yours tight!" And the small hand never trembled, or wavered, but clutched close, like a vice.

Her voice did him good; her tone of resolution inspired him; her steady grasp encouraged him; and he was enabled to recall his dizzied senses.

He looked up, and as he beheld that exquisite face leaning

over towards him, wish for his success beaming in every feature, he flung up the ball from the point of the arrow, and strove to regain the top of the wall.

But on raising his arm to the edge, he found he should not be able to obtain sufficient purchase,—even when he should gain the assistance of the other hand which was now held by Gruoch,—to enable him to draw himself up that height.

The page cast one look of mute dismay towards his young mistress.

She perceived his peril.

"Keep a brave heart, Culen! Hold my hand steadily! You are safe, fear not!" she exclaimed. "Here, Grym! Grym! Come here; make haste! Help, Grym, help!"

The whole scene has occupied some time to relate; but it had in fact passed so rapidly, that by no means a long time had elapsed since Grym had retreated to the other end of the platform to fetch the arrows.

He soon perceived the emergency; and hardly giving utterance to his thought:—"What have these children been about?" he leaned over the top of the wall, and seizing Culen's hand from Gruoch in his own herculean grip, he drew him carefully, but readily, from his perilous position.

The first impulse of the kind-hearted bowman was to hug the lad in his arms; the next was to shake him by the scuff of his neck, and to ask him gruffly, "What d'ye mean by playing such fool's tricks, master page? Don't you see how you've frightened my young lady, here?"

And as they both looked at Gruoch, they saw her turn pale; she staggered forward, and would have fallen to the ground, had not Grym caught her in his arms.

"Poor lamb!" he muttered, as he bore her gently to her own apartments; "She's as tender-hearted as she's beautiful."

"And she feels thus for me!" whispered Culen's heart, as he stood rooted to the spot, his cheek flushed, and his chest heaving, at the thought.

They were wrong. Neither the page nor the man-at-arms guessed that her swoon was the effect of mere physical sympathy; a sickening sense of danger past; a reaction of the

nerves,—braced for the moment by strength of will, with an object in view,—but suddenly relaxed from their tension, by the native weakness of a frame less powerful than her spirit.

Years passed on. The handsome girl became a confirmed beauty; the wilful child became the determined woman; and Gruoch, still in her non-age, and in person singularly delicate, was yet in spirit, in bearing, in formed opinion, a woman.

Her affection for her father was the tenderest sentiment she felt. Her partiality for Grym was the most active preference she had. Her liking for the page partook of kindly tolerance; and she accepted his services as those of a faithful serf, or of an attached and favourite spaniel. She would as soon have dreamed of one of her father's hounds conceiving a passion for her, as have entertained the most remote suspicion of the one which glowed in the heart of the brave and handsome Culen.

One evening she had been pacing the castle platform, enjoying the purity of the mountain air, and the pleasant warmth of the sun, which shed a glowing beauty upon all around,—valley, lake, and hill lying steeped in the golden light, ere the setting glory should depart. She was attended as usual by Grym and Culen, with the former of whom she was discussing the incidents and success of a falcon-match that they had flown together the day before. From hawking, they went on to talk of other sports. Of strength, and of courage, and of how she marvelled that any one could rank softness and sweetness by their side.

"Of what use are these so-called virtues?" said she. "Do they serve to win one high object? Softness, sweetness, meekness, gentleness, and a whole tribe of these washy goodnesses, were only styled virtues by knaves who sought to take advantage of the easy prey which such a creed would produce them in its professors."

"Then you, my lady, would not give your vote for our new king Duncan, if monarchy went by election;" said Grym.

"Not I, in faith;" answered the lady. His are carpet virtues, which might show well enough in a clerkly monk, but

beseem not a Scottish sovereign!—And when, pray, is this gracious meekness, this milk-and-water amiability to be crowned?"

"This day se'nnight is appointed for the convocation of nobles at Scone, my lady;" replied Grym. "The coronation is to be celebrated with great magnificence, they say."

"And how do the people stand affected to the new sovereign?" asked his mistress.

"Public opinion hath two voices just now;" said Grym. "Though most men are loud in their praises of the good king Duncan, there are not wanting those who say his cousin Macbeth would have better filled the throne. He is a right valiant gentleman, and hath well-nigh as close claims to the monarchy as the king himself, for Macbeth is the son of the one daughter of our late Malcolm II, as Duncan is of the other."

"Then why not have chosen the valiant knight, instead of the carpet knight? Why not Macbeth, rather than Duncan, if they possess equal claims?" asked Gruoch.

"Because Duncan's mother was the elder of the two sisters;" replied Grym. "Besides, it is whispered that the valour of Macbeth partakes of somewhat more than hardihood and bravery, and that to what his partizans call courage, his enemies might give the harsher name of cruelty."

"The bold and daring never want for enemies among the weak and timid, who are legion;" said lady Gruoch; "and who stigmatize that which they cannot hope to emulate."

While she thus conversed, she had remained half sitting half kneeling, in the recess, and had been leaning upon the ridge of the wall, or rather upon the arm of the page; who had placed his arm so that she might have its intervention.

She leaned upon it as she would have done upon a cushion, or upon his cloak, had he folded it into one for the purpose; totally unconscious that the support she used was human in its sense of her touch, or that there was human passion beating at the heart close beside her.

"Were all men of my mind," continued the lady, "better befits a sceptre be wielded with harshness and glory, than with

infructuous mildness. These are no times for milk-sop kings! All men should be soldiers—and kings, most of all men!"

"All men should be soldiers?" echoed Culen half unconsciously.

"Ay, master page. Though I thank you for your pains to save my shoulder from the hard edge of this stone wall; yet methinks I could better like to see your good right arm strike a firm blow in Scotland's cause, than benumb itself into a cushion for a lady's back, though the back be mine own."

"And have I your ladyship's leave to seek service in the field?" asked Culen, his eyes sparkling at the thought of winning favour in hers. "If my lord, your father, and yourself, sanction my leaving the castle of Moray, I ask no better fortune than the chance of showing my lady that the arm has been nerved to achievement, not 'numbed to inaction, by having had the honour to serve her for a cushion."

"Well said, Culen;" said the lady Gruoch, looking at him with a smile of approval; "I will myself obtain my father's consent to your quitting our inglorious castle of ease. Would my mother's wish had been accomplished! Would I were a man to go forth with you! You should be my trusty squire, and Grym, my faithful man-at-arms;—and so should the knight of Moray set forth to the field doughtily equipped! Would I had indeed been born a man!"

In a few days, Culen left the castle of Moray, to seek his fortune as a soldier. In parting with him, the gentle old Kenneth had bestowed a kindly benizon on him; Grym had growled him some rough but sensible advice; and the lady Gruoch had given him her hand to kiss; which favour he had knelt to receive, and which had done much to console him for the sacrifice he made in leaving her.

For some time after Culen's departure, the castle of Moray seemed to sink into more than the usual state of dullness and stagnation, of which its young mistress had complained.

But one day its inhabitants were thrown into a state of unwonted interest, by the arrival of two strangers at the gates,

who entreated to speak with Kenneth, thane of Moray, and his fair daughter, the lady Gruoch.

One of these strangers was a Highlander, the other, a young damsel.

The Highlander said that he was travelling in search of employment for his only child, his daughter Doada; that she played the harp passing well; that the monks at the neighbouring abbey had told him that she would most likely find entertainment and favour at the castle of Moray. That he hoped that the lord of Moray and his fair daughter would give Doada leave to let them hear her skill on the instrument she bore beneath her plaid; then signing to the damsel, she threw back her tartan screen, and disclosing a face of great loveliness, amid a profusion of golden hair, she began to play.

The sounds she drew from the instrument were sweet and full; but when she accompanied them with her voice, chanting songs full of variety, now of pathos, now of animation, the venerable Kenneth listened entranced by the delicious music.

While her father was occupied with the Highlander and his daughter, the lady Gruoch beckoned Grym to her side, and by a glance indicating the Highlander, she whispered:—"Is it not he?"

"It is the same, sure enough;" replied the man-at-arms. "I knew him again the moment I cast my eyes on him. Shall I bid him begone, my lady?" added he.

"No, no; I do not fear him now. I was a child then, and dreaded every shadow, I suppose. I will speak to him; I only wished to be sure that my recollection served me aright."

The lady Gruoch rejoined her father; who was still intent upon Doada and her music. He had promised that she should remain as a companion to his daughter at the castle of Moray, saying that he should be well pleased to add to his retainers a damsel of such merit.

Her Highland father seemed gladdened by the prospect of such a home secured for his child, and was turning to depart, when the lady Gruoch looked him steadily in the face, and arrested his steps by saying:—

"The death you foretold, befell; and now I would fain

hear the other weird you were about to read that morning. Speak!"

The Highlander passed his hand across his brow, muttering, as he gazed at the lady Gruoch:—

"I remember now! The castle of Moray! Ay, there was death there then! Somewhat else there was, I dimly saw, but cared not to read, to one who had offered help. My hour was then upon me. My hour of darkness and of light. Darkness to the soul, light to the vision. When my hour is upon me, I see more than is given to ordinary human ken."

"And is not your hour upon you now? Speak, old man! Read my weird now!" said lady Gruoch.

The Highlander still gazed upon her; but he shook his head, and laid his finger upon his lip.

"How came it, you were no longer in the wood, when assistance was sent to you? Who are you? What are you?" asked she hurriedly.

"I am a poor Highlandman, my lady. I had wandered across the hills to these parts, on an errand to the abbey near here, where I knew I should find help. I returned forthwith to my mountain home, whence I have never since strayed, till compelled to do so for my child's sake. I could have borne want myself, but cannot look upon her starvation."

"She shall find a home here," said lady Gruoch graciously; "the pleasure her melody gives to my father, would alone make her a welcome inmate to his daughter. She shall dwell with us."

"And you will let her father's eyes behold her occasionally?" asked the Highlander, after renewing his thanks.

"I will myself send her to see you, safely escorted;" said Gruoch. "Meantime, among my maidens, she shall be nearest to my person, in token of the favour in which her skill is held."

The Highlander, blessing heaven for the auspicious prospects of his child, embraced her, bowed lowly, and withdrew.

The presence of the fair young damsel, and her passing excellence in song, served well to enliven the monotony of

existence in the castle of Moray; but to the lady Gruoch herself, the still life of the castle seemed as irksome as ever.

However, soon there came tidings of an event that promised to supply food for curiosity and interest to all within the walls of the castle.

A missive to the lord of Moray from Sinel, thane of Glamis, informed his old friend, that his son, Macbeth, craved leave to pay his respects to the lord of Moray, and to his fair daughter, the lady Gruoch, of whose charms fame had spread report, even so far as to his castle of Inverness.

The news spread of the expected approach of the renowned visitor; and all was anticipation among the inhabitants of the castle. Every one desired to behold the illustrious chieftain, a cousin of the king himself.

Macbeth arrives. The old thane receives him warmly, as a worthy representative of Sinel, his father. The lady Gruoch joins her welcome to that of her parent; and while the gracious words flow from her lips, Macbeth looks upon her surpassing beauty, and his heart owns he has never beheld charms of equal potency with those of the thane's daughter. There is something in those azure eyes that enthrals his gaze; their fascination is only rivalled by the brilliancy of her complexion, by the lustre of her golden hair, and above all, by the magic of a commanding presence, which asserts the claim of such a combination of beauty to homage and admiration. He is content to submit his senses to this new and intoxicating influence; content also to find that his gaze nowise seems to distress the object of his fixed regard. She is animated, self-possessed, radiant in conscious charms, performing the duties of hostess, and presiding at the festal supper-table with ease and grace. Her retired life has induced no bashful embarrassment; she seems born a queen.

By degrees, he discovers yet a new charm amidst so much beauty. He sees a something of answering admiration in the manner in which the bright flashes of those azure eyes met his. The handsome person of the chieftain, the ardour of his manner, coming to confirm the impression which his previous

reputation had created upon her imagination, leads her to regard him with scarcely less admiration than he does her; and their mutual looks and discourse reveal more and more how each is struck and enchanted with the other. The gentle remarks and kindly speeches of the old thane fall almost totally disregarded, while the attention of the young people becomes every instant more exclusively devoted to each other.

Suddenly the sound of music is heard. At a signal from the lord of Moray, the Highland maiden strikes a few chords on her harp by way of prelude to the song he has requested.

"Doada will sing to us, my lord;" said Kenneth to his guest. "Her music is worthy your ear, I can assure you."

"What name did you say? How call you the maiden?" said Macbeth, abruptly regarding her.

The damsel blushed, at the sudden gaze of one so illustrious, till the blood flew over neck and brow, and her fair skin showed the suffusion so apparently, that a lily seemed suddenly transformed to a rose.

Gruoch's face flashed scarlet too.

When the music came to a close, Kenneth canvassed applause for his favourite Doada; and he drew his guest's attention to her again by asking if they did not possess minstrelsy in their poor castle of Moray worthy even of royal hearing.

"Ay, by my faith;" replied Macbeth. "And the damsel is as fair as she is gifted. I scarce ever beheld hair so beautiful. Golden locks such as are found in the castle of Moray, are rather of heaven than of earth."

The chieftain's look rested again upon the lady Gruoch as he spoke; and found her in heightened colour looking more bright, more beautiful, than ever.

Before the company retired for the night, Macbeth bade his aged host farewell, saying that he and his retinue would in all probability have left the castle before the old thane would be stirring. When his host expressed regret at parting with him so soon, the chieftain told him that he had hopes of being able to return in a day or two, and lengthen his visit to him and his fair daughter. With mutual interest and liking on all sides,

they parted; and in a short time, all within the castle seemed slumber and repose.

Yet within the chamber of the lady Gruoch there was neither. Agitated as she had never been before, she paced her room for many a long hour through the night.

Paramount above all was the image of Macbeth. His martial bearing, his handsome person, his ardour of admiration for herself, all claimed her woman's preference.

In every respect he embodied the ideal she had conceived of a hero whom she could love, whom she could seek to win; and this very hero she dared to believe she already saw won, at her feet, at her disposal, to accept, or to reject.

Was it indeed so? Was he indeed so surely won, so entirely hers?

And then came the thought that had flashed into scarlet witness upon her cheek, when it had first crossed her mind, as she beheld the glance he gave towards Doada, when he heard her name. Again she felt the pang that darted athwart her heart, as she heard him praise the highland maiden's golden hair; and though the praise was followed closely by words that directed the compliment as much to herself—yet the mere thought of sharing his admiration with another was not to be endured, and she muttered with clenched teeth and hands:—

"She shall go. No minstrel girl,—be her name never so soft, her hair never so bright,—shall come between me and my hope! She goes!"

No sooner had Macbeth and his train departed, than the lady Gruoch told the Highland maiden, Doada, that she intended to allow her to go and pay the visit to her father which had been promised when he left her at the castle.

The damsel blushed her gratitude and thanks; but when the lady Gruoch spoke of her immediate departure, Doada ventured timidly to say that she feared nightfall would set in ere she could reach the hut among the mountains; and that it was late now to set forth.

"But I have provided that you shall have safe escort;" said her mistress. "Grym is to accompany you, maiden; and he will protect you from all harm, be it by day or by night, and

place you safely within the arms of your father, with whom I wish you all happiness. Farewell!"

During the long hours of afternoon and eventide, the lady Gruoch heard the murmurs of regret which her old father could not repress, for the loss of Doada and her sweet music.

"Why was she sent away?" he asked, when his daughter joined him.

"I sent her to visit her father in their mountain home; you know it was so promised, when he left her with us."

"But why should she have gone to-day? Besides, it is foul weather. Is not that snow, I see yonder, through the oriel window? She will starve with cold, poor thing!"

"It was fine when they set forth. I sent Grym with her."

"But why send her to-day?" reiterated the old thane, whom vexation at the loss of his wonted recreation, and uneasiness for the safety of the minstrel maiden, rendered unusually querulous.

"It was needful she should go;" replied Gruoch in the peremptory tone she knew was always sufficient to decide a question with her father. "It is well-nigh three months since she has been with us, and her Highland father will be wearying to see his child."

Kenneth submitted to the tone which generally closed all points at issue between them. He merely sighed, and resigned himself to his accustomed patting of the dog's heads, seeming to take refuge in their mute tokens of sympathy and attachment.

When Gruoch bade her father good night, and retired to her own apartment, a sense of shuddering chill and foreboding crept over her, and she made excuses to detain her attendant women about her person somewhat later than usual.

"Make up the fire well upon the hearth, Eoda; draw the logs together, that the blaze may last;" said she. "Have you made fast the door which leads on to the platform, Lula? The chamber seems unusually cold. So; you may leave me. But let the door of the ante-room remain only slightly closed, that I may call you, if need be."

When the women had withdrawn, the lady seated herself beside the blaze, and strove to derive cheer from its influence.

The snow had continued falling fast and thick; and now it lay in one wide sheet of white, bespreading castle, hill, and valley. The window overlooked the platform, which has been so often alluded to, and to which there was access from this range of apartments through a small door opening from the lady Gruoch's own chamber. For awhile she gazed forth upon the blank desolation.

"I would have her away," muttered she; "why then should I repent that she is away? The fact crowns my desire, and all is as it should be."

She closed the curtain, and flung herself but half undressed on the bed. The lady Gruoch closed her eyes and slept; but her sleep brought no peace. Her limbs lay stretched in inaction, but the mind was still tossing to and fro in a sea of agitation. The soul was wakefully fighting, while the body lay drowzed and prostrate. The waking soul roused the sleeping body, and constrained it, still sleeping as it was, to perform the deeds of waking. The volition of the spirit made the passive body involuntarily fulfil its promptings, and move mechanically obedient to interior impulse. Asleep in body, yet awake in spirit, the form of the lady Gruoch arose from the bed, and, traversing the apartment, halted near the door, which led from her room on to the castle platform. Some idea of recalling Doada, of concealing her within the castle from the sight of Macbeth, instead of sending her forth into the snow-storm, had taken possession of her soul, and in the strength of its impress, this thought now led her into the open air in the dead of the night, with her thinly-clad slumbering body, and her fighting spirit. The door was unbarred, unclosed, and the lady stepped forth.

"You are cold, Doada—come back. You shall not perish;" she muttered. "Abide in this retired chamber—it is but for awhile—till he is gone. Do as I bid you, maiden, I will have it so! How cold you are! Come in, I tell you! The snow will starve you—and my father will be grieved! Cold—white—dead!"

The lady Gruoch had crossed the platform; and as she concluded her muttered words, she laid her hand on the stone wall that skirted the rampart. The sharp cold of its touch had startled her senses into consciousness, and she awoke to find herself wandering alone in the inclement air at dead of night, half clothed, half asleep, and shivering with cold and awe. She shrank back to her chamber, hastily refastened the door, cowered beneath the bed-clothes, and summoned the attendants to renew the fire, and watch beside her couch till morning.

With the light of day her courage returned, and she could teach herself to look back upon the tumult of the past night unmoved. She persuaded herself that Doada was safe. She remembered that Macbeth was possibly to return that day to the castle, and that it behoved her to meet him with smiles and a serene brow, unruffled by traces of the emotions of the past night.

The thought of his near approach, and of the probable result of his return, helped to wreathe her lip with smiles, give a glow to her cheek, and light her eyes with a glance of fire; and by the hour when the chief and his retinue reached the castle of Moray, its mistress shone forth with all her accustomed radiance of beauty.

Macbeth soon contrived to lead the lady Gruoch apart, and they leaned, talking together, in the recess of the oriel window of the hall. The old thane noted them as they stood a little apart thus, thinking how handsome they both looked, how happy they seemed, and how well fitted for each other they were; and then the idea ensued, of how goodly-assorted a couple his daughter and the son of his friend would make in marriage.

And soon, no doubt of mutual preference remained to mar the joy of either Macbeth or the lady Gruoch. She found that the chieftain thought but of her; he discovered that he had succeeded in winning her regard. Their attachment was avowed to her father; and it was agreed that Macbeth should but return to Inverness to impart to his own father his successful suit; and that as soon as preparation could be made to

receive his bride, he should return to the castle of Moray to claim her, and carry her to her new home.

The lady Gruoch had scarcely bidden farewell to her new-trothed lord, when Grym returned. He entered the court-yard of the castle, as she was retiring from it, on her way to her own apartment. There was that in the face of the man-at-arms, besides its usual ugliness,—more ghastly than its wonted look, that arrested her steps, and made her pause to hear what he might have to say.

"I performed your bidding, Madam;" said he. "I took her to her home."

"Well done, good Grym; faithful to thy trust;" replied his lady. "You placed the maid within her father's arms. 'Tis well."

"I did, Madam; but——"

The man-at-arms faltered; and there was that in his eye and voice that belied his rough exterior.

The lady cast a searching look upon his face. She read a terrible meaning there; but she said with her firm steady voice:—"You did? 'Tis enough; thanks, good Grym." Then staying to hear no more, she resumed her way to her own apartments.

But not so summary was the enquiry of the old thane with regard to the disappearance of his favourite Doada. He questioned Grym closely concerning the incidents of their journey; and from the sparing curt speech of the man-at-arms he gathered the knowledge of her sad fate.

The Highland father had received into his arms, in lieu of his living daughter, a frozen corpse!

The lady Gruoch reached her own chamber. Thence, she stepped out upon the platform. She paced to and fro, and resolutely shunned the remembrance of Grym's face, which seemed to suggest more than she cared to know.

As she turned in her walk, at one end of the platform, she beheld at a few paces from her, the Highlander, standing immediately in her path.

"How camest thou hither, good man?" she asked; surprised. "How found you this part of the castle? What has brought you to me?"

"I am come to read thee thy weird at last!" said the Highlander. "When first I looked upon thee, I beheld a crown spanning the fair young brow—but I beheld it through a red mist, and would not reveal the fearful secret to one who proffered aid."

"A crown?—a crown, said'st thou?" exclaimed the lady.

"Ay, a crown, a royal crown—the golden badge of sovereignty! I would not then foretell so dread, so fatal a vision. But thou hast sent me my child through the snow-storm, and I read thee thy weird through the red mist. A crown is thy weird; the red mist is blood!"

"What matters, so that the weird be a crown!" cried the lady Gruoch. "Methinks to gain that, I could stem torrents of blood; scarcely heeding though some of my own were shed to mingle with the stream."

"Thine own?" echoed the Highlander, with a scoffing laugh; "That were too gentle a sentence."

"What mean'st thou? Speak farther!" The lady advanced, as she spoke, towards the spot where the figure of the Highlander stood with folded arms and derisive lips. "Speak, man!" she continued. "Tell me thy knowledge. I will have it!"

In her eagerness, she still advanced, and would have laid her hand upon the folded arms. She touched no substance. She saw the mocking features, and beheld distinctly the chequered colours of the tartan plaid in which his figure was enveloped,—but she felt nothing. No tangible matter met her grasp, and with horror and awe unspeakable she recoiled;—then plunging desperately forward, she passed through the vivid shadow as if it had been a rainbow!

An instant—and the whole thing had vanished; and when, some time after, her women sought their mistress, they found her extended on the ground, senseless.

Messengers bring tidings of Macbeth. They bear a letter to

the lady Gruoch, in which the chieftain tells her that the active service in which he is engaged, not only interferes with the fulfilment of his own wishes, but it likewise employs all his available men, so that he fears he shall scarce be able to send messengers to her so frequently as he desires; but he concludes with beseeching her to believe him, through all lets to their continued intercourse, to be her true and faithful knight, devoted to her beauty solely, in the hope of speedily calling it his own for ever.

Upon this letter, and the attachment it breathes, the lady Gruoch lives for awhile. But soon her thirst for farther tidings of her betrothed lord rises to a feverish longing, which must be satisfied.

She resolves to send Grym to the camp of Macbeth; though she knows the remainder of the men-at-arms who will then be left at the castle of Moray, will afford but insufficient protection for her old father and herself. But the anxiety to obtain news of Macbeth is paramount, and the lady Gruoch despatches Grym.

He has been gone long enough to warrant expectation of his return. The lady Gruoch begins to look impatiently for it, when suddenly there is an unwonted stir in the court-yard of the castle. The portcullis has been raised; an armed horseman has been admitted across the drawbridge, who leads his steed by the bridle through the gates; the charger bears a wounded man upon his back, who is supported in the saddle by the armed knight that walks by his side, leading the horse.

In the armed knight, who wears his visor raised, the men-at-arms of the castle of Moray have recognized their former companion, Culen; in the wounded man, they have beheld their fellow-retainer, Grym.

The unusual stir in the court-yard attracted the attention of the lady Gruoch, and brought her forth to see who the wounded man might be.

"It's Grym, our Grym, madam," whispered the men, as they made way for their lady to come near. "He is wounded; and it seems mortally. For he stirs not; and speaks not."

"Grym! my faithful Grym!" exclaimed the lady Gruoch, as she bent towards the bleeding soldier. "What, rouse thee,

man; art thou indeed so sorely hurt?" The dying man raised his eyes by an effort. "That's well; cheerly, good Grym. And what news, my trusty Grym? Hast thou the packet? Hast thou no letter for me?" she added.

There was a visible struggle. The faithful man-at-arms strove to speak; but blood gushed from his lips instead of words; and he could only faintly attempt to lift his hand towards the breast of his buff doublet. The lady at a glance understood the movement, and eagerly withdrew the desired packet, to bring which he had forfeited his life-blood. Some of this same life-blood soiled the fair hands that were searching the bosom of the dying servitor for that which he had died to preserve for her.

"Faithful unto death!" she cried, as she transferred the precious packet from his bosom to her own. "But must thou indeed die, my faithful Grym? Can no leech save thee? Half my possessions I would gladly give to him who might restore thee to life, to thy mistress. Who may I ever hope to attach to me, as thou hast been devoted to me? Devoted unto death; my faithful Grym!"

The dying man's eyes looked fondly at her as she uttered these expressions of regret at his loss. To him they conveyed no particle of the self-consideration that was betrayed in every word.

He expired with the belief that his mistress held him dearly-valued, and he died contented, proud, happy, in the conviction of her regard.

The lady Gruoch looked upon the uncouth visage of the dead man with sincere (because selfish) regret. Then she withdrew from his side, that the attendants might remove the body of their comrade; and she heaved one deep sigh, while a voice near her said:—"I could find it in my heart to envy Grym, to be so mourned!"

The lady turned to look upon him who spoke; and she then perceived, for the first time, that the armed figure beside her was Culen. But Culen so changed in bulk and stature—so altered in look and bearing; no wonder she failed to recognize him.

The slight figure of the youth she once knew had acquired both breadth and height, and displayed stalwart proportions

beneath his cuirass and breast-plate of burnished steel. The light flaxen curls which had formerly been allowed to revel in luxuriance around the page's countenance, were now close-trimmed and showed little beside the beard and moustache that gave additional vigour to the knightly face.

"It is to your prowess I owe the rescue of my faithful Grym, I doubt not, sir knight;" said the lady Gruoch.

"The arm that you redeemed from a service of luxurious ease," said Culen, elated by her praise, "has learned strength; only too proud if it may return to devote its allegiance in the same behalf. Let me still serve my lady, but as her knight now —not as her page."

"A trusty squire of dames sir Culen will ever be, I doubt not," replied Gruoch. "But let him not think I esteem his championship lightly, when I enlist it henceforth in behalf of my father rather than myself. I trust to you, good Culen, to faithfully serve him, when his daughter leaves him. Meanwhile, receive my earnest thanks for your valorous assistance to my lost Grym."

The lady turned to quit the court-yard as she spoke; and in the act of retiring, her hand was once more raised to her bosom, to clutch the secured letter.

"'When his daughter leaves him!'" unconsciously repeated Culen half aloud.

"Ay, master Culen," replied one of the retainers, who, happened to overhear him. "Have you been abroad in the world, and have not heard that our young lady is to wed the valiant Macbeth? Why, that was the letter of her betrothed husband, that she seized so eagerly from Grym's bloody doublet. A lady's impatience regards not bedabbling its dainty fingers, when a lover's letter is in view, I warrant me; and yet I doubt if the omen be canny."

Culen remained an instant in mute despair at what he had heard. Then exclaiming, "Farewell ambition, fame, hope, life itself!" he flung himself into the saddle, and galloped full speed away from the castle of Moray for ever.

The letter from Macbeth brought welcome tidings indeed.

By the time that the letter reached the hands of the lady Gruoch, she might daily expect his approach.

The chieftain and his retinue arrive. The venerable thane greets the betrothed husband of his daughter with affectionate welcome. That which the lady Gruoch extends to her expected lord is no less warm. Proudly, exultingly, she prepares to unite herself with this noble warrior, this king-descended hero. A new existence is opening for her; a life of hope, glory, and ambition, to be shared in acquirement and fulfilment with the man of her preference. One with whom she may feel alike in ardour, activity of spirit, and daring aspiration.

In her, Macbeth beholds imperial beauty. In her there is that which at once captivates his senses, and commands his admiration and esteem. He is proud to call such beauty his own; proud to submit himself to its influence; proud to share with her his hopes, his life—to make her the partner of his greatness. Proud were they of and in each other; and joyfully did they link their lives in one, accepting a joint fate from that time forth.

The existence of the newly-married chieftain and his lady, in their castle of Inverness, fulfilled the anticipations which the prospect of their union had excited in each. They found their mutual satisfaction as ample and complete as they had hoped. In all her husband's pursuits, schemes, and views, lady Macbeth demonstrated an eager and intelligent participation.

Achievement followed achievement; promotion ensued to promotion; instances of royal favour were heaped upon the chieftain; and to this large share of royal favour, was added increase of rank; for, not long after his marriage, Macbeth, by the death of his father, Sinel, became thane of Glamis.

These rapid and accumulated circumstances in the rise of Macbeth's fortunes, made the long-hoarded secret hope of his own and his wife's ambition assume a palpable form. Macbeth could not but remember that his own mother was no less nearly descended from the late king, than she through whom the reigning monarch derived his royal seat, while his wife could not but sometimes allow her fancy to muse on that predicted

circumstance in her fate, which afforded confirmation of all that now seemed ripening to a fulfilment.

To inherit their present growing dignities,—and that crowning one which might be in store for them, a son was born to them; and Macbeth beheld the beauty of his mother, while she beheld the representative of his father's honours, in the infant Cormac, who thus enhanced the joy of both parents.

A secret faction arose. A party of the insurgents had the hardihood to plan an attack upon the castle of Macbeth, thinking the thane himself to be absent on State affairs. But he had returned suddenly to Inverness, and was unexpectedly on the spot to sally forth and repel the invaders.

Lady Macbeth, anxious for her husband's safety, ascended to the battlements with her infant son in her arms, that she might watch the fight. She endeavoured to distinguish her lord's figure among the combatants, and her solicitude for his safety, soon yielded to admiration at his valour.

She smiled as she surveyed the scene of contest, with a sense of prospective victory. She heeded not the danger of her own position, in the satisfaction of observing the bravery of her husband; she saw not the peril that surrounded both himself and her, in the thought of their approaching triumph.

For the portion of the battlements where she stood, was not entirely sheltered from the flying arrows of the besiegers; and at any moment one of these missiles might reach her, as she stood there with the child in her arms, marking the progress of the skirmish.

But close beside her—watching her, as intently as she was watching the field,—crouched a queer, shambling, rough, bent figure. It was that of Indulph, a poor dumb creature, a distorted, half-wild being, who had sought service among the underling retainers of the household, and who had shown a singular hankering after the presence of the lady of the castle, and an especial fondness for her baby son, Cormac.

And there, at that time, he lay, stooped and crouching, close to the ground, a yard or two from the portion of the battlemented wall where she stood. Upon her and the child he

keeps his eyes fixed, gleaming from amidst the shaggy elf-locks of ochrey red that hung about his face, and left but little of his features to be distinguished, save those eager wild eyes that never strayed from the objects of their regard.

The battle rages on, more fiercely and more near, and in her increased interest in the contest, lady Macbeth holds her little son half unconsciously, clasping him to her bosom, without withdrawing her eyes from the fight.

The combatants press more closely. The besiegers rally. A shower of arrows is discharged, and a few of them flying higher than the rest, reach the battlements on which the lady stands.

Indulph springs from his lair. He makes wild and vehement gesticulations to his lady that she should retire from the dangerous station she is occupying. But she is intent upon the affray, and heeds him not.

An arrow alights near the spot. Then another. In despair at her peril, Indulph exclaims :—

"For your boy's sake, if not your own, stand back, madam!"

The lady starts, and looks round in amazement.

"Indulph! Can the dumb speak! And with that voice, too! I surely know that voice!"

She fixes her eyes upon the stooping, crouching, dumb savage, now erect, alert, energetic, eager, imploring her to withdraw from her perilous situation.

In another instant, he darts forward, covers her son and herself with his interposed body, while the threatening arrow pierces his own throat, and he falls at her feet.

The locks of red hair are scattered back from the dying face, and lady Macbeth recognizes without a doubt, the features of Culen.

She bends over him, and utters his name with wonder and pity.

"I no longer envy Grym;" he murmurs.

"But how came you hither? What means this disguise?" she said.

"I could not live without beholding you. I had lost all hope —I relinquished fame as worthless. I crept hither, hiding

stature, features, voice, beneath the stoop, the stained hair, and the eternal silence of the dumb crouching Indulph, in the single thought of again living in your presence—and it might be, of dying in your service. I am blest, that it is thus."

The secret lay revealed before her. Love for her—a passionate devotion to herself, had then inspired this heart, that was fast ebbing forth its last tide at her feet. But the thought of how this would appear to Macbeth, were he to come to a knowledge of this passion, beset her with a sense of annoyance. She felt mortified rather than exalted by the discovery of this fervent attachment; and a stern look settled upon her face, as she watched the blood that oozed from the death-wound.

Footsteps approach. Macbeth hurries towards the spot where she stands, that he may tell her their enemies are defeated—that the day is their own.

"But how comes this wounded man here?" said her lord, when he had received her proud congratulations. "A stranger! Perhaps a traitor!" added he. "Do you know who or what he is, dearest chuck?"

The dying eyes mutely entreat her, that he may have the bliss of hearing her acknowledge his lifelong faithful attachment. But hers are averted—she will not meet his look—she will not *see* his last request.

"It is Indulph, the dumb helper, my lord," said one of the by-standing attendants. "He is wounded in the throat—mortally, I think."

"He saved our boy's life, by the loyal intervention of his person, my lord," said lady Macbeth; "thank him for us both."

"It is too late; the brave fellow's dead;" said Macbeth, looking at the expiring throe with a soldier's experienced eye, and with the indifference to death proper to one bred amid scenes of slaughter. "Come, my dearest love, let you and I, in to the castle. A feast shall be held in honour of our victory; and this young hero's escape shall be celebrated in flowing wine-cups. You breed our boy well, sweet wife, in teaching him thus to look upon a battle-field betimes. Thou art truly fit to be mother to a race of heroes!"

Not long after Macbeth thus felicitated his wife and himself on the salvation of their son, Fate has decreed that the boy shall not live; the little Cormac is carried off in his infancy.

In the midst of her fierce pang for the loss of her offspring, lady Macbeth receives tidings of her old father's death; but she bears both strokes with her stern composure, that she may stimulate her more impressible husband, whose duty calls him from Inverness.

Lady Macbeth fails not to remind her lord of how closely his own interest is concerned in preserving the throne from assailants; its present occupant being of his own line, and scarcely maintaining tenure by a nearer claim of blood than that which he himself possesses. Between the husband and wife, the question of this equally near claim, and its possible results, has been discussed; but with scarce-uttered, scarce-conceived intentions. Their imaginations are fired with the same thought; but they hardly permit its burning image to be visible to each other. Dimly, luridly, it lurks latent, fed with foul vapours of unhallowed desire; only vaguely, dare they permit themselves to shape its existence in words;—but they know and feel, that a crown,—even though it be gemmed with bloody drops,—is, in fact, that one glowing thought.

The thane departs.

Lady Macbeth receives tidings of her husband's progress from time to time; for he has no dearer thought than that of sharing his successes with her.

Exultingly expectant, lady Macbeth abides in the castle of Inverness; and each fresh letter that she receives, confirms by its prosperous intelligence, the fulfilment of her aspiring hopes.

News reaches her of the successful issue of the combat between her lord and the rebel Macdonwald, whose traitor head is fixed upon the royalist battlements.

Close upon the heels of that messenger arrives another, who brings word of the encounter at Fife, wherein the invading army of Sweno, the Norway king, is put to the rout and defeated, and the victory secured, by Macbeth, who is to be invested im-

mediately with the forfeited title and estates of the thane of Cawdor; he having disloyally fought beneath the Norwegian banner.

Scarcely has lady Macbeth welcomed these tidings, when a letter is placed in her hands by a trusty envoy from her lord, wherein she reads words of wondrous import, that kindle into flame the smouldering fire of her thought.

Her self-communing upon this perusal, begins in these words of apostrophe to her lord:—

> "*Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be*
> *What thou art promis'd.*"
>
> MACBETH, Act i. sc. 5.

TALE III.

HELENA; THE PHYSICIAN'S ORPHAN.

DOCTOR GERARD was an enthusiast in his profession. He believed the art of healing to be a science divine. His skill, his tenderness, his charitable care, made him renowned among the destitute population of Narbonne; although he had as yet obtained little fame or employment among its wealthier inhabitants. But his time was so fully occupied with attendance upon his patients, that it was fortunate for his wife that her little girl's society afforded a great resource from the solitude to which the incessant preoccupation of her husband would otherwise have condemned her.

There was a spacious public-garden a little way out of the town of Narbonne, where Madame Gerard, with little Helena by her side, often spent a large portion of the day. Here, with a view to her child's health, would Gabrielle and her little girl sit; the mother working, or hearing Helena say her lessons. Sometimes the child would clamber about the back and sides of the seat —which was a sort of long wooden chair with arms, that might have accommodated half-a-dozen persons; sometimes, a game of ball, or battledore, or bilboquet, would engage the attention, and exercise the limbs of the little Helena; while the mother watched her active happy child, her fingers employed in knitting some winter comfort for its father.

One afternoon, when Gabrielle and Helena had stationed themselves in one particular corner of the long wooden seat, which was shadily situated under a tree—a bonne and her

charge, a fine little boy about a year or two older than Helena, approached the spot, and sat down near them.

Gabrielle's basket, knitting-ball, and one or two other articles belonging to her, lay on the seat beside her. She would have drawn them towards her, to make room for the strangers, but as there was plenty of space beyond, she left all still.

Presently the little boy collected a quantity of pebbles from the gravel path, and came towards the bench with his treasure in his arms. He deposited the heap on the seat, and then commenced clearing a space farther on, by brushing away Gabrielle's basket, ball, &c., with his arm, taking no heed that the articles were suddenly tumbled on to the ground by this unceremonious proceeding on his part.

For some time, little Helena contented herself with silently remedying the mischief, by picking up her mother's scattered property, and replacing it on the seat; but after repeating this process once or twice, and finding that it by no means mended matters, as the boy invariably brushed them down again, she said :—"Take care, little boy; mamma's basket will be broken."

"I want room to build a castle;" replied the boy, giving another clearing nudge. Gabrielle removed the basket to the other side of her, and put the knitting-ball into her apron-pocket, without speaking, that she might observe the children.

"What pretty hair you've got!" said Helena next; after having looked with admiration at the boy's curls, which hung down, glossy, dark, and thick, upon his shoulders. "How bright, and how long, and how soft it is!" added the little girl, touching it, and smoothing it down with her fingers.

"Don't! you'll tangle it;" said the boy, drawing away his head.

"Fie, master Bertram!" exclaimed his bonne; "let the little girl admire your beautiful hair!"

"I shan't! Let it alone!" replied master Bertram.

After a pause, during which Helena had shrunk to a little distance, whence she tried to peer at what he was doing, she said :—"Are you building a castle?"

"Yes; don't you see I am?"

"I can't well see so far off; may I come nearer?" asked she.

"Take care you don't jog, then;" said the boy.

Helena comes a little closer; becomes greatly interested in the tottering fortalice, which with much careful piling together of pebble-stones is gradually rearing its walls beneath the boy's hands. She leans forward, watching breathlessly; when, being a little too near for master Bertram's convenience, his sturdy little elbow is suddenly stuck in her chest, to remind her to keep farther back.

She obeys the warning for an instant; but forgetting caution in her eagerness to watch the progress of the castle, she leans too forward, and again receives a hint in her chest that she is in master Bertram's way. The blow this time is directed with such unmistakeable earnestness of reproof, that the little girl reels back, falls, and bruises her arm. The bonne exclaims; Helena's mother picks her up, and asks her if she's hurt.

"No, he didn't mean it; did you, little boy? Here, kiss it, and make it well!" said she, holding out her arm.

"It's bloody and dirty; indeed I shan't kiss it," said the boy, turning away to finish building his castle.

Again the bonne said:—"Fie, master Bertram!" And again she was satisfied with saying it, and with the slight effect it produced upon master Bertram himself. For presently, Bertram was as busily engaged as ever in the erection of the pebble stronghold, and Helena was again leaning over him, forgetful of the late consequences of her vicinity to the sturdy little elbow. The boy at length said:—"Don't worry, little girl. Don't jog so. Go and pick up some more stones for me. I shan't have half enough for the high tower I mean to build here."

And accordingly, Helena patiently trotted to and fro collecting stones in the skirt of her frock, and bringing them in heaps to Bertram, who signified his approval of this state of things by graciously accepting her contributions, bidding her deposit them on the bench ready to his hand, and then to go for more.

The two children went on thus for some time, until the castle was completed to master Bertram's satisfaction; when Helena's

proposal to cut out some paper dolls with her mother's scissors, and to place them inside the pebble fortress as its Baron and Baroness, and suite of retainers, was negatived by master Bertram's "No, no; that's stupid work; dolls are only fit for girls! What's this?"

"That's my bilboquet; you can have it, if you like, to play with. And here's a ball; or here's a battledore and shuttlecock; if you like them better." Master Bertram seized the offered toys; and became very amicable with his new acquaintance; letting her be his playmate, by permitting the little girl to run and fetch his ball when he tossed it up high, and it fell at an inconvenient distance; or to pick up the shuttlecock, when it dropped upon the ground in consequence of his failing to hit it, and by other such little sociabilities, and condescending equalities which he established between them in the games they had together.

Meantime, while familiarity was growing between the two children, the bonne seated herself nearer to Gabrielle and began conversation with the theme always most agreeable to a mother's ear.

"Ah, madame," said she, "what an amiable child is your little daughter! What grace! What sprightliness! And what beauty! An absolute nymph! And what goodness! What sweetness! What patience and forgiveness of pain and injury! An absolute angel! Ah, madame! How fortunate you are, to possess so much loveliness, and so much virtue united in the person of that seraph, your child! How rare is such a union! There is master Bertram, for instance. He is beautiful as the day, but his temper is deplorable. He has the adorable grace and loveliness of Cupid himself, but he has not that gentleness, that softness which inspires love! Alas, no! he is rough and selfish!"

The sentimental and sententious bonne went on to explain to Gabrielle, that her charge, master Bertram, was sole heir of an ancient family, and only child of the count and countess of Rousillon. That he was inordinately indulged, and that, in consequence, his natural defects,—those of pride, self-will, want of generosity, and disdain of those beneath him in birth,—

had been enhanced rather than repressed. She spoke of his mother, the countess, as a virtuous gentlewoman; and of his father, the count, as a noble gentleman, in high honour at court, possessing the confidence and friendship of the king himself. She told Gabrielle that his lordship, the count of Rousillon, was at present suffering from a disorder which had originated in a severe wound in the chest that he had received on his first battle-field, some years since; and that he had quitted his chateau in Rousillon to sojourn for a time at Narbonne, in the hope that he might receive benefit from the change of air. The count had been accompanied hither by his countess, and by his little son, from whom his parents could not bear to be separated.

Many times, after that day, Gabrielle and Helena met the bonne and her charge in the public garden; and, Gabrielle's pleasant manners soon winning the good graces of the bonne, as little Helena's good-humour rendered her an agreeable playfellow to master Bertram, it came to pass that the countess, ere long, heard a good deal from her son of the little girl he had found in the gardens, and from her bonne of the little girl's mother, who seemed to be quite a superior kind of person—quite a lady, indeed, though only a poor physician's wife, as she had by chance discovered her to be.

The countess of Rousillon, whom anxiety for her husband's recovery, made eager to seize any chance of cure, was struck by hearing that the stranger's husband was a clever physician; and resolved to lose no time in applying to him for advice.

Gerard, upon being consulted on the count of Rousillon's case, modestly said, he thought he could undertake to relieve suffering, and avert immediate danger.

The result was the fulfilment of his promise; and the count, restored to more robust health than he had ever dared to hope might again be his, was enabled to return with his wife and child to their estate at Rousillon.

The noble family, on taking leave, testified their gratitude to their benefactor, and expressed a hope of seeing him at no very remote period, as a guest at the chateau de Rousillon.

Soon after this event, Gabrielle, Gerard died, leaving the

little Helena forlorn indeed. Her father, utterly absorbed in his professional pursuits, tardily perceived that his little girl's solitary grief had preyed on her health; and in alarm lest another victim should be the consequence of his neglect, he wrote to his friend and patroness the countess of Rousillon, enlisting her sympathy in behalf of his motherless child, and entreating her counsel and aid. He begged that she would extend her former kind intention towards himself to Helena, by receiving her for a time, at the chateau de Rousillon, that change of scene might efface the sad impression which had been made on her young mind, and rescue her from association with a broken-hearted man, lost in his own eternal regrets.

The countess's reply was a warm compliance, brought to Narbonne by Rinaldo, her steward, who was charged to escort Helena back to the chateau de Rousillon. On the arrival of her young guest, the countess could not avoid being struck with the change that had taken place. The lively, chubby, rosy child, had grown into the pale quiet girl,—fast-growing, hollow-eyed, and lank. Traces of premature care and suffering sat upon the young face, and the effect of her white cheeks, and thin arms, was touchingly heightened by the contrast with the mourning frock she wore.

The lady of Rousillon received the poor motherless girl with a gentleness and pity that went straight to Helena's heart; and the young girl was still hovering near her kind new friend, when Bertram entered the room. He had been out in the park, with his dogs, one or two of which followed him into the saloon where his mother sat.

He was now a fine tall lad; and swung into the room, glowing with exercise, in high spirits and good humour, flinging his hat off, and discovering a face sparkling with animation, and hair bright, thick, and curling.

As his mother's eye rested upon her handsome son,—a picture of healthful beauty, her heart swelled with happy pride; she thought of the contrast he presented with the poor little pale thin creature at her side, and she drew her kindly towards her.

"Come here, Bertram;" said his mother. "See who is here.

Do you not remember your acquaintance of the Narbonne gardens, little Helena?"

"Is that little Helena!" said Bertram. "I should never have known her!"

"I was absurd enough to think of you just the same as you were;" continued he. "I somehow fancied, when I heard you were coming to Rousillon, that I should see just the same rosy dumpling of a child that you were then, forgetting that of course you would be altered, as I am."

"I don't think you're altered; I should have known you anywhere;" said she. "I remember your hair exactly; and the high eye-brows—and the colour of your eyes, just as I recollect them, when you used to be watching the shuttlecock fly into the air."

Helena, in looking at Bertram, was hardly aware of what made her wince, and shrink, as the two large dogs which had accompanied him into the room, were now sniffing and snuffing and trying to make acquaintance with the strange little girl, by poking their cold noses against her bare arms, and pushing their rough snouts up to her chin, and other slight amenities, somewhat startling to a child of her age, unaccustomed to the proximity of large hounds almost as big as herself.

"Bertram, my dear," said his mother, "hadn't you better send these dogs out of the room, or call them off, for I think they're annoying our petite amie here?"

"Here, Nero; come here, sir; lie down, Juba;" said Bertram, slightly whistling to his favourites. "Are you afraid of dogs? An't you fond of 'em?" added he to Helena.

"Are you?" said she.

"Fond of them? Oh yes; I like to have them always with me. That's why I like to be out in the park, because there nobody minds 'em; the saloon isn't thought their fit place, is it mother? I know you only allow them to be here, because you love to please me, more than you care about the dogs, like a good kind mother as you are. Don't you?"

His mother smiled; but after a little lounging about, Bertram swung out of the room again, whistling his dogs after him: and Helena sat reproaching herself with having driven

him away, by her folly in being unable to help starting when the dogs touched her. She resolved to break herself of such a stupid trick, and to try and make friends with the noble animals on the first opportunity.

The count Rousillon was absent from the chateau at this period. A few days after Helena's arrival, a messenger came to Rousillon from the count, bearing letters to his countess, with a present to his son of a handsome fishing-tackle, which had often been the object of Bertram's wishes.

There was a fine piece of water which adjoined the chateau, and which in one part of its stream formed the moat that surrounded the turreted irregular walls. Bertram had frequently expatiated to his father on the capabilities afforded for angling in this spot; and the indulgent parent now remembering his son's desire, sent him the means of its gratification.

When Helena learned what the packet from Paris probably contained, she begged of the countess that she might have the privilege of carrying it at once to Bertram, who was out in the park.

The countess nodded and smiled, and away went Helena.

"See what I have here for you!" she cried from a distance, as she perceived Bertram among the trees. "My lord, your father, has sent Baptiste from Paris with this box for you! And we think it must contain the fishing-rod and flies you wished for so much; and my lady allowed me to bring it to you, that you might open it at once, and see what it is."

"Set it down on the grass, and undo the fastenings;" said Bertram. "I hope it really is the rod! Oh yes! And what a capital one! And what a good line!"

"And look at these curious flies!" exclaimed Helena.

"I'll put one on the line directly;" said Bertram. "I must have a throw. I know there must be millions of trout here. Hush, don't make a noise; don't talk. Hush, Helena."

A moment after, he himself loudly exclaimed at his dogs, who were snuffing to and fro, taking a busy interest in all that was going on, and at length uttered the sharp bark of excitement and sympathy with their master's new pursuit, which had provoked his ire at the interruption to his sport.

"Confound those dogs!" he exclaimed, "I wish they were hanged or drowned out of the way. It's impossible to fish, while they're yelping about one."

"Mightn't they be put out of the way, without hanging or drowning?" asked Helena, with a smile; "you may want them to-morrow, you know, when you're tired of angling; and then you would rather find them safe in their kennel, wouldn't you?"

"How you talk, Helena;" said he. "If they're to be taken to their kennel now, I must go with 'em, and leave my fishing; for they won't mind any body but me; and they won't leave me for any body else's bidding."

"Won't they?" said she; "let's try."

The young girl uttered a little melodious whistle which she had practised in imitation of the one she heard Bertram use in calling his dogs. Then she went a short distance, slapping her frock as she had seen him do upon his knee, and mimicking as well as she could the imperative "Here, Juba, here! Hie along, Nero!" with which Bertram was accustomed to enforce their obedience. Finding that they still lingered round their master, she drew from her pocket a piece of rye-cake which she had found effectual during her late assiduous training of the dogs and herself to a mutual good understanding. In the present instance the lure proved successful; for wagging their tails, and following Helena with wistful eyes, they drew off the field, leaving Bertram in peaceful possession of the banks of the stream.

Here she found him, on her return, engrossed in the pursuit of his new pleasure. And during the whole afternoon, and for many following days, he still eagerly enjoyed the sport; Helena lingering by his side, helping him to fix his flies, to watch the bites, to land the fish, to carry home the basket, and in a thousand ways rendering herself an acceptable companion.

One morning, they had just succeeded in hooking and landing a fine trout, and Helena had secured the flapping victim in the basket, anticipating the pleasure of Bertram's displaying this prize to his mother; when, having adjusted a fresh bait, and thrown his line again across the stream, he suddenly uttered

an exclamation, which caused his companion to look round. She found that the end of the rod, with its appended line, had snapped off, and was now floating away towards a plot of rushes and river-weeds that grew in the water near to the opposite bank, at a considerable distance from the spot where they stood.

"Oh, it will be lost!" exclaimed Helena. "Your rod will be spoiled, and useless without the top. Let us try and get it back. How can we manage? What had we best do?"

"It's gone—it's hopeless!" said Bertram. "It will be quite floated away by the time we can get round to the opposite shore; or lost among those flags and weeds. Provoking!"

"The count's kind gift! His beautiful present!" said Helena.

"Well, it can't be helped, at any rate;" said Bertram, as he walked away, adding:—"I'll go and take Nero and Juba out for a good long walk. I haven't had a ramble with them this many a day; ever since I've been looking after the trout."

Helena remained for a few minutes longer, still looking intently across the stream, which spread broad and far just there forming a small lake among the grounds of the chateau; and then hastened on to a spot in the park, where she knew a small pleasure-boat was moored. She soon succeeded in undoing the fastenings, and in paddling herself across the stream, back to the plot of rushes. Here she spent some time in searching minutely among the flags, and at length she became unwillingly convinced that the missing rod was not there.

She was reluctantly turning the head of the boat to re-cross the stream, when its current drew her attention to the fact that the rod had probably floated on farther, quite away from this spot. "The stream flows from the torrent in the dell, across this broad piece of water towards the moat;" thought she. "I'll follow the course of the stream; perhaps I may find Bertram's rod still."

She pushed the boat on in that direction, peeping into all the sedgy nooks, and grassy crevices, along the shore in vain; until she entered the moat which washed the walls of the chateau, entirely surrounding them. These walls were built

irregularly; forming all sorts of odd angles, and crannies, and close recesses. In one of these, floated by the current, and washed far inwards, lying in a tangled heap, Helena spied the lost line, with the fragment of rod. She steadied the boat as well as she could across the narrow inlet, which was formed by two meeting angles of the edifice; for the space thus left between the walls that rose sheer from the water, was too small to admit the head of the vessel. Helena stretched herself as far over the side as possible; but she could not nearly reach the floating object, even with the tips of her fingers. How tantalizing it was, to see it lie there within a few feet of her, but as much out of her power, as when out of sight!

She seized the oar with which she had paddled herself thither; but she not only nearly lost her balance, trying to wield so heavy an object, but she had the mortification to perceive that instead of gaining any hold of the line with the unmanageable end of the oar, she only succeeded in pushing it farther than ever beyond her reach, until it washed away right up to the extreme end of the recess, where it lay bobbing and floating in coy retirement—obvious, yet unattainable.

Helena felt so frustrated and baffled in the very view of success, that she could have shed tears of vexation; but recollecting just in time for the honour of her childish wisdom, that such a proceeding would advance her no jot—at the very same fortunate moment popped into her head another idea no less sagacious. This was, that she would try and make one of the dogs swim across the moat and fetch the line out of the recess. Then remembering that she could hardly make the dog comprehend what he was to seek, she determined to row back and bring the dog with her in the boat to the spot, where she might point out to him the precise object she wanted him to fetch.

Her experiment was crowned with complete success. She returned, accompanied by Fanchon, one of the smaller dogs, Bertram having taken with him his two favourites; and with its help, she succeeded at length in securing the top of the fishing-rod and line. Her first impulse was to take them to their owner, in the hope of pleasing him by the news of their recovery; but

remembering that his zest for angling had suffered an abatement, she resolved to keep them quietly for the present.

Another letter arrives from the count, stating that he is still detained from rejoining his family. The count speaks of a valued friend of his, the lord Lafeu, who has been sent by his royal master on a diplomatic mission to some neighbouring state. This friend being anxious, during his absence, to obtain honourable protection for his daughter Maudlin, the count has invited the young lady to pass a few weeks at the chateau de Rousillon, on a visit to his countess.

Mademoiselle Lafeu arrived and was greeted with all distinction and affectionate welcome. She proved to be a lively girl, with an air of decision and court-bred ease about her manners that bespoke her to be an inhabitant of the capital.

She formed a striking contrast with the provincial-bred Helena, who was quiet, retiring, and undemonstrative in speech.

In externals there was the same dissimilarity between the two young girls. Maudlin was brilliant in complexion, had eyes bright and restless, with lips wreathed in smiles; while Helena was pale, her eyes were soft and thoughtful, with a look of steadfastness in resolve, and her mouth was sedate, though the lips were full, and so coral red, that they afforded the point of colour, in which her face would otherwise have been deficient.

To complete the contrast, Maudlin was dressed in the height of the then Parisian fashion, a rich father's liberality enabling her to indulge in every extravagance of adornment; while Helena, a poor country physician's daughter, wore a simple black frock of the plainest make, and of the least costly material.

On the morning after Mademoiselle Lafeu's arrival at Rousillon, the countess, having done the honours of the house, by showing her young guest over the chateau, deputed her son to escort her through the park and the rest of the domain, which was extensive, and very beautiful.

With more eagerness of manner than he usually displayed, when the gratification of any other than himself was in question, Bertram complied. He led the way, talking animatedly with

the young lady, who, interrupting him in the midst of something he was saying, turned to Helena, with:—"Will not you come with us?"

"Go, ma petite;" said the countess, in answer to the mute enquiry of Helena's eyes.

They crossed the drawbridge over the moat, and entered the park, Bertram dwelling with much complacency upon the noble growth of the trees, upon the valuable timber they would yield, upon the beautiful site of the chateau, its picturesque structure, its best points of view, and upon the territorial grandeur of the estate generally.

"This is so beautiful a place, I can hardly fancy sighing to leave it, even for dear delightful Paris!" said Mademoiselle Lafeu. "And you must have plenty of amusement here, too, to compensate for the court gaieties, and the society of the capital. What a fine place for a gallop on horse-back, a row on the lake, a falcon match, a trial with the bow and arrows, or for hunting or fishing, or the thousand enjoyments which you country gentlemen can command. There must be capital fishing in that piece of water. Do you know, I'm a bit of an angler myself? When I have been en campagne with my father, at our house at Marly, he has taught me to bait a hook and throw a line, so that I should scarcely be afraid to challenge such proficients as you and Mademoiselle Helena doubtless are."

"You like angling?" said Bertram. "How vexatious that I should have no rod to offer you. Mine is broken—but—how I wish I had it now!"

"I have it safely for you, I'll fetch it;" said Helena eagerly. "I got it back—it's mended; I'll bring it to you directly."

"Do, do, Helena! But how on earth do you mean? How did you get it back?" said he.

In a few words, she explained her recovery of the detached portion of his rod and line, and then hurried away to fetch them.

Highly pleased, he began to question Mademoiselle Lafeu on her knowledge of the sport, and to express his delight at the prospect of enjoying it with her. She answered by dwelling upon Helena's having taken such pains to gratify him, and by

reproaching him for the slender gratitude he had shown for her friendly zeal.

"If you go on praising it so, you'll make me detest it, instead of teaching me to feel grateful for it;" said he. "I hate things or people that are belauded and cried up by every one. My mother tells me so much of Helena's good behaviour that I'm rather sick of it; and now you are doing the same, and giving me a downright surfeit of her merits. She's well enough, but she's no such paragon, as you'd all make her out to be."

"You are a spoilt young man, and have your own way too much, and are too little contradicted, I see;" said Mademoiselle Lafeu. "If I were to take you in hand, I would soon effect a reform."

"I think I am very well as I am, and want no reform;" said Bertram laughing; "but still, you may take me in hand, if you like; I don't know that I should object to that; especially when the hand that is to take me in it, is so white and so soft," said he, with another boyish struggle between admiration and embarrassment, as he took her hand, and attempted to kiss it.

"One of the first things I should expect you to alter, would be your conduct to women," said Mademoiselle Lafeu, with the little air of superiority which girls of her age allow themselves to lads of his; "you should be less forward to me, and more polite to Helena. See, where she comes, with your fishing-tackle; and yet you do not hasten to meet her, and relieve her of the burthen. You a cavalier fit for a Paris circle, and so insensible to a woman's due!"

"On the contrary," said Bertram, with his careless laugh; "I'm quite sensible of her peculiar excellence; I'm thankful to her, as I am to my dogs, for what they do for me; I'm bound to acknowledge her ministry, as I am to my hounds for their attachment, and their faithful fetching and carrying. I'm a judge of dogs, you know,—and she's a good spaniel."

During the visit of Maudlin Lafeu, Bertram heard a good many truths with respect to his haughty conduct, told him with no sparing of his self-love by the young Parisian; but they served little else than to pique him into extra admiration of herself; while they rather increased than diminished his contempt

of Helena, whose modest zeal showed like servility against Maudlin's freedom.

Time passes on. Bertram's boyish desire to visit Paris is yet unfulfilled; for his father, firm in his conviction that a court is an unfit school for youth, has sent him to college for a few years.

The king still frequently detains his favourite by his side; and the count, anxious to secure for his wife affectionate companionship in her solitude at Rousillon, undertakes the entire charge of Helena. He writes to her father, entreating him to commit her to the countess's and his own care, engaging to provide her with masters and all requisites for a solid education.

Helena accordingly remains at the chateau de Rousillon, growing in knowledge, accomplishment, and virtue, while the improvement in her health, spirits, and mental culture, brings corresponding increase of beauty; and, on the verge of womanhood, she possesses as many attractions of worth and excellence, as she presents those of person and matured loveliness, which her early childhood promised.

Helena's nature was full of the gentlest strength of love; the most unflinching capability of sacrifice; the deepest tenderness, and the bravest courage, the maidenliest diffidence, with the most lavish generosity; the truest and most steadfast affection, with the most passionate warmth.

But as yet, little occasion for the development of these qualities in Helena presented itself. Till such occasion should arrive, she seemed a quiet, earnest, obliging girl, faithfully attached to the countess, who ever treated her with well-nigh a mother's regard.

Bertram, on the recurrence of his vacations, spent them, by his parents' wish, at Rousillon; and on each of these occasions he failed not to call upon Helena for her sympathy with his own indignation at being compelled still to defer repairing to Paris, where he might spend his holidays so much more to his liking.

True to her friendship, at the expense of her growing love, Helena failed not to condole with him on these repeated dis-

appointments, and even to help him all she could to obtain the desired permission, although it would destroy her own fondest prospect,—that of seeing him at Rousillon. For the intervals when he was absent, were occupied in thoughts of his last visit, of what he had said, of how he had looked, of what he had chiefly liked; or in dreams of his next-approaching one, of what he would say, of how he would look, and of what he might like, that she might prepare it for him against his coming.

At length a period arrives when she is able to greet him with something that she knows will please him. She is so eager to give him this gratification, that she watches by the park-gates for his arrival during the whole morning that he is expected at the chateau. The welcome sound of his horse's feet reaches her ear; she springs forward, when the abruptness of her appearance startles the mettled animal, who rears, and plunges, and it requires all Bertram's good horsemanship to keep himself firm in his seat.

"Is that you, Helena? How could you be so absurd as to start out in that sudden way just before him? Any horse would have shyed at such a thing, especially a skittish high-blooded creature like this. So then, so then, my beauty!" said he, patting the arching neck of his favourite, that still quivered and throbbed in every one of its swelling veins.

"I had some tidings for you, that I knew would please you —and I could not help coming out here to be the first person to tell them to you. It was very rash and foolish of me, to rush out so unawares upon poor Charlemagne. Poor fellow! Poor fellow!" And she patted the horse on the same spot where his master's hand had so lately been.

"Well, but what are your tidings, Helena? You don't tell them to me, after all;" said he, as he rode on slowly, she walking by his side.

"My lord the count arrived here from Paris, yesterday, and ——"

"My father at Rousillon!" exclaimed Bertram; "why didn't you say so before, Helena?" And the young man was about to ride on impetuously.

But Helena called to him that he had not yet heard what she had to tell; and with a muttered "pshaw," he checked his horse, until she should come up with him.

"I heard the count tell my lady yesterday, that he had lately made the acquaintance of two young men, whom he thought would make admirable friends for his son. They are brothers, of the name of Dumain, and from what more fell from him on the subject, I cannot help thinking, my lord means to remove you from college, and introduce you at court, the very next time he returns to attend the king."

"Do you really think so, Helena?" said Bertram with sparkling eyes and heightened colour. "This is indeed good news! I long to see my father, and learn if it be true."

He flung himself off his horse, as he approached the chateau, and throwing the bridle to Helena, said:—"Just lead Charlemagne round to the stable for me; I cannot lose a moment in seeing my father."

Bertram hurried away; while Helena kept her eyes fixed upon his handsome agile figure as long as it was in sight, and wondered at the blank that seemed to fall upon her spirit as he disappeared.

"Why am I so unhappy, when he is so elate?" thought she; "ought I not to rejoice that he is pleased? What delight shone in his eyes as he bent their hawk glance upon me while I spoke the words. And what eyes they are!" She threw her arm over the saddle where he had lately sat, and looked up as if she could still see the eyes dancing and sparkling with joy at her tidings. "He is happy to go; how selfish of me then, not to feel glad that he is going. Glad that he is going! Glad at his absence! Ah, how can I? Glad!" she repeated in a soft sad murmur, as she hid her burning cheek against the neck of the horse.

The noble animal turned its head towards the young girl, as if in dumb sympathy with the low sobs she uttered, and the tears she could not repress, which trickled down the glossy skin of its throat.

The countess's page at this instant came running towards Helena, bidding her hasten in to his lady, who was

in sad distress at a sudden attack of illness which had seized the count Rousillon, only a few minutes after his son's arrival.

Giving Charlemagne's rein to the page, Helena hurried to the chateau, where she found the late tranquillity in which she had left it, exchanged for a scene of the greatest confusion and anxiety. Messengers were despatched post-haste to summon Doctor Gerard, whose skill, together with the powerful remedies he brought with him from Narbonne, served temporarily to restore, but were ineffectual to rescue or to save; the count Rousillon expired, surrounded by those he loved, and respected by all who knew him.

Doctor Gerard returned alone to Narbonne, the countess having entreated him to leave Helena with her to be the companion of her widowed solitude. But soon Gerard himself was struck down by mortal illness. Before his death he consigned to Helena a medicine chest containing many valuable secrets, the hoarded sum of many years experience and practice. "It is the fitting inheritance," he wrote, "of a poor physician's child. May its bequeathed treasures, the sole ones I have to bestow upon her, prove the basis of good fortune and source of felicity to my Helena!"

The period of mourning passes in acts of charity and kindness towards those without the walls of the chateau, and in gentle words and deeds among each other, the surviving home-circle withinside.

The months creep by, and the time approaches for the departure of Bertram. Helena's sorrow is twofold; but although grief for her father's loss serves to screen that which she feels prospectively, yet conscious love bids her hide the tears which have so natural and so obvious a source, lest their double origin be suspected.

She seeks every pretext for keeping her chamber; or wanders away solitarily through the park, where she may indulge her melancholy with unobserved sighs and tears, and unheard plaints at her lowly fate, which forbids the hope of linking it with one so far above her.

Helena was strolling in the park while thus she mused,

lamenting; the deer gathered round her in expectation of their accustomed notice; but she paid little heed to them now, so occupied were her thoughts.

Presently she heard approaching footsteps; and on raising her head, she was aware of an extraordinary figure that made its way towards her, bowing, and congeeing, and recommending itself to her notice.

It was that of a personage equipped in the most extravagant fashion. His suit was of saffron-coloured taffeta, snipped and slashed, and guarded with showy gilt lace, and hung with a profusion of glittering buttons and gaudy scarfs. A pair of bright red hose garnished his legs, which, with his arms, were bound with fluttering bows and ends of ribbon, that made all his limbs seem gartered alike. By his side hung a long sword; in his belt stuck a dagger; and he wore a plumed hat very much on one side, with a spruce defiant air, as if announcing the reckless, roystering, bold soldado.

"Madam," said he, raising his hat, and advancing towards the spot where Helena stood; but cautiously and dubiously, with an eye cast upon the stags and their towering antlers, which plainly indicated the source of his hesitation; "may I beseech of your ladyship's goodness to inform me whether this be the chateau and domain of count Rousillon?"

"It is, monsieur;" answered she.

"And may I crave farther to know of your fair grace, whether his lordship, the count Rousillon, be at present at the chateau?"

Helena was about to reply, by mentioning the count's death; but bethinking her that Bertram was now count of Rousillon, she answered:—"Unless the count have ridden forth, since I left the chateau, he is probably at home now;—but if you proceed to the gates, sir, the servants will inform you whether his lordship is able to receive you."

"I am charged with a letter to him from a dear college friend of his, madam, introducing to his acquaintance my poor self, whom you are to know by name as Parolles, and by profession as a soldier. Of appertaining accomplishments which may claim your ladyship's favour, I shall say nothing, as I trust

to time for their discovery, or of deeds, as I think fame may one day blow their record hither; but I will rest my present hope of a gracious reception, on your ladyship's own indulgence, of which I behold assurance in that fair form and benignant aspect."

Helena bowed somewhat loftily to this flourish.

"I would crave permission to tender my homage at once on your ladyship's fair hand," said Monsieur Parolles, "but that I cannot reach you, surrounded as you are by those antlered deer, in manner of Diana, the huntress-goddess. My warfare has hitherto been with man, and not with stags; with ramparted fortalices, not with embattled antlers; otherwise I would make my way to you, through these living defences, with my own good sword."

"You might not be permitted to assault the inoffensive herd, monsieur;" she said. "The deer are held protected at Rousillon. You may pass on, monsieur, there is nothing to fear!"

"Fear, madam!" exclaimed Parolles, as he hastily picked his way forwards; "fear! but I shall find meeter opportunity, I trust, of convincing you that fear and I are unacquainted, save as I inspire it to my foes."

"I have a notion that monsieur is less to be dreaded as a foe than as a friend;" thought Helena, as the soldado disappeared. "It is not the friendship of such a man as that, or I'm greatly mistaken, that the count would have sought for his son."

Monsieur Parolles, having recovered greater dignity of step, after he had lost sight of the deer, lounged on until he came to the drawbridge, against a side-post of which leaned a tall gangling lad, eating grapes with great voracity, and chucking their stalks into the moat; while near to him stood a bright-eyed, cherry-cheeked damsel, who was holding the basket of fruit which supplied the lad's enjoyment.

"Now rest thee content, Isbel," he said, while he slightly varied his occupation of chucking the grape-stalks away, by chucking the damsel under the chin; "be not impatient; I have promised to ask my lady's good leave; and it shall not be my fault, if I do not shortly marry thee."

The damsel was about to reply, but looking up suddenly, and seeing Parolles approach, she tripped away abruptly, while the grape-eater turned to see the cause of her startled withdrawal.

"Save you, fair sir;" said he to the advancing stranger.

"Save you, good fellow;" replied Parolles.

"None of mine, sir;" said the tall lad. "I hope I know my place better than to claim fellowship with such a sober-suited gentleman. My bauble and coxcomb would sort but ill with such apparel as that;" said he pointing to the frippery which decorated the person of Parolles; who replied:—

"I see, friend, now; thou'rt the fool here."

"Ay, sir;" said Lavatch; "and no great argument of your wit that you found not that out before. It is the part of wit to find out its counterpart in others, giving it honour where it exists; as well as readily, though pityingly, to discover its lack, where it exists not. I warrant me now, the fool could sooner track out what amount of folly lies in the gallant soldier, than you, the gallant soldier, can perceive folly where it dwells openly,—in the fool."

"Go to, thou'rt privileged;" was Parolles' only answer.

"Marry, sir, and the privilege of a jester is like to have good scope when such visitors approach the chateau;" returned the clown. "We have been dull enough of late; mourning the dead is no season for jesting. When good men die, and sincerity mourns, light-hearted folly hangs it head for lack of employment, and takes to weeping for company."

"I met one pale face in the park, that bespoke true sadness at heart, matching the outward garb;" said Monsieur Parolles. "It was that of a young lady. Daughter or niece to the late lord of Rousillon, I take it? Though I never heard that the young count mentioned a sister. He spoke but of a mother."

"Marry, sir, the lady you met was no relation of our house. She claims no title to the name of Rousillon. All her having is, that she's good and fair; all her descent is, poverty and an honest name; all her title is, Helena, the doctor's daughter."

"Poor! A doctor's daughter!" exclaimed Parolles; "truly, she gave herself as many airs as though she had been Crœsus'

heiress; and could not have spoken more haughtily, had she owned, not only the whole herd of those confounded horned beasts—those outlandish branch-headed animals—but the park where they range.

"But I have not time to stay dallying here with thee, fool;" said Parolles. "I will find fitter time to argue conclusions with thee. For the present, I shall desire thee to convey this letter to thy young master, count Bertram of Rousillon; and to inform him that its bearer is monsieur Parolles, a gentleman and a soldier."

Monsieur Parolles' letter of introduction,—which set him forth as a valiant and experienced soldier, a man of great knowledge, versed in several languages, and a generally accomplished person,—was favourably received by the young count; who welcomed his visitor with warmth accordingly, retaining him at Rousillon as his friend and companion, until his departure for Paris, and inviting him to go thither also.

After Helena's first meeting with the new visitor at the chateau, she was a little surprised at the alteration in his mode of accosting her, which was now as impertinently familiar, as it had then been deferential; but divining the true source of the change, she was as much amused as surprized.

Some days elapsed; and then the lord Lafeu arrived, bringing with him a gracious mandate from the king, containing his majesty's desire to see the young count Bertram of Rousillon at court.

The countess receives the valued friend of her husband with highest tokens of respect, although he is come with the express purpose of taking away her son, so doubly dear to her now, since she has lost his father, whose image he is in shape and feature.

Previously to their setting forth, the whole company assembles in the saloon at Rousillon. The countess presents her favourite Helena to the excellent old lord Lafeu, who speaks kindly and encouragingly to the maiden.

For poor Helena is endeavouring to master her emotion, to conceal her overwhelming grief. Now that the time is actually come, for parting with the object of her secret passion, she

knows not how to suppress her sobs and tears; and is relieved when the countess's timely allusion to her father's loss, affords a pretext for allowing them to flow unrestrainedly.

She weeps, and says :—

"*I do affect a sorrow, indeed, and yet I have it too.*"

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL, Act i., sc. 1.



TALE IV.

DESDEMONA; THE MAGNIFICO'S CHILD.

THE gondola glided on. Beneath its black awning, —extended at full length upon its black leather cushions,—lay a young man, clothed in a suit of deep mourning. But in his face there was nothing that assorted with these swart environments. No shadow, save the one from the sad-coloured curtains, darkened the countenance, which was radiant with hopeful happy thoughts. For though the suit he wore was for a father, yet so unreasonable a tyrant had that father been, that his recent decease was felt to be emancipation from slavery, rather than a loss and a sorrow. In deference to his father's will, in dread of his father's power,—this young man had carefully concealed his marriage with a very beautiful girl of humble fortunes. But now, that he was free to avow his choice,—he hastened to his Erminia, his wife, and the child she had just brought him.

The very first hour she could bear removal, Brabantio's impatience to see her his acknowledged wife, and installed in the rank and the dignity which belonged to her of right through him, caused her to be conveyed with their infant daughter to the palace on the grand canal; and on that very night a costly entertainment was given by Brabantio in honour of the infant Desdemona's baptism.

The Magnifico chose that the splendour of the lady Erminia's household, the lady Erminia's retinue, the lady Erminia's garments and jewels, should surpass that of any other lady in Venice, because the lady Erminia was the spouse of Signior Brabantio. But in Erminia's heart lurked a feeling

that she would have been contented with far less glare and ostentation in her lot, for she was by nature gentle and modest.

She had given her child, the little Desdemona, as nurse, a woman, whom she had known in her humbler days, and whom she took to her new home, together with her two children; and allowing Barbara and Lancetto to run about the house as playfellows to her infant daughter, who throve under their fostering love.

Barbara, one of the most frolicksome sprites that ever flew about in the shape of a young girl, skipped around baby Desdemona; singing blithesome songs, and gay ballad rhymes. Lancetto, the boy, was more quiet in the entertainment he was able to afford the child; for he had been deaf from infancy.

Yet he spared no pains to entertain the little creature to the utmost of his ability; and would often persuade his mother to let him take her and her young charge abroad upon the waters of the lagunes, in a gondola; which he had early learned to manage with skill.

As the child grew in years, more of her time was spent with her mother, and less with her nurse.

In educating her child, there was one thing, which it had been well, could the lady have instilled; it was the one thing needful in her own nature, as it was that qualification in her daughter which was alone wanting to make her as perfect a being as ever existed. Could the lady Erminia have taught her the unflinching candour which ought to belong to goodness and greatness,—have inspired the courage of transparent truth, she would have invested her daughter with a panoply that would have proved her best protection against the diabolical malignity by which she was one day to be assailed, and borne her scathless through the treachery which wrought her fate.

The same exquisite gentleness formed the characteristic of the daughter, as of the mother; and that which might have been stimulated and strengthened into consummate beauty of character, was, by example, suffered to degenerate into the single point of weakness which marred its perfection.

Accustomed to see her mother yield in silence even to

things in which she did not acquiesce; to see her avoid doing what she tacitly seemed to agree to; the little girl insensibly acquired just such a system of conduct. Brabantio remained paramount in the affections of his wife and daughter, but he did not possess their confidence.

Erminia contented herself with pursuing her own quiet way, carrying comfort and relief to many a destitute family, while she took care so to time her charitable visits, as that they should neither interfere with the hours which Brabantio passed in her society, nor in any way come to his knowledge.

On these pious errands she was frequently accompanied by her young daughter, thus initiating her in the sweet comforts that are to be drawn from bestowing comfort on others.

The little Desdemona repaid this devotion with her whole heart. She never voluntarily quitted her mother's side; and hour by hour would she sit close to her, getting her to tell the long stories she loved so to hear of those old bygone times, when her gentle mother had been a girl herself, and had lived in retirement and even penury, with her old blind father and her sailor brother; and then Desdemona would utter longing wishes that she could behold and know the gallant sailor-uncle so long absent and unknown to her, but whom she loved for the sake of her mother.

But years passed on, and still they saw or heard nothing of Gratiano.

On the death of the nurse, Marianna Marini, her daughter had been promoted to the post of handmaiden to the lady Erminia. Like many vivacious people, Barbara felt sorrow keenly; but she gradually recovered her spirits, cheered by the gentle kindness of the lady Erminia and her daughter, and once more her song was heard blithely ringing as she tripped about the house, sweet and subdued in her lady's presence, or cheerily carolling as her lay kept time to her fingers in her silk spinning.

She had fallen in love. There was a certain handsome young gondolier, named Paolo, who had found out that Barbara had not only the sweetest voice, but the neatest figure, the trimmest ankle, the most sparkling eye, to be found in all

Venice; and some such sentiment—slightly incongruous as it might be in its expression,—he contrived to put into easy singing verse—Italian in its ease, its singing chime—amore and cuore — bellezza, dolcezza—doloroso, amoroso — vezzosa, graziosa—&c. &c.; and then he sang them and thrummed them beneath a certain window that he trusted might be hers. By good fortune the window not only proved to be Barbara's, but the voice, the guitar, the sense—or nonsense—of the rhyme, and the good looks of the singer altogether appealed so irresistibly to the young girl's fancy, that she became as much enamoured as himself; and it was an understood thing between them that as soon as Barbara should have her mistress's sanction to her marriage, they would be united.

Pleased to see her favourite restored to her native gaiety, the lady Erminia took kindly interest in the affection that subsisted between the young couple, and would sometimes rally her attendant upon having won the liking of the best-looking youth in all Venice, and smile at the dimpling and blushing with which Barbara acknowledged that she thought so too, even while she coyly pretended to care little for good looks, not she; but that she pitied him for being so desperately in love with herself; for she understood that while half the girls in Venice —forward creatures!—were plaguing him with their admiration, and running after him, yet that he couldn't forsooth fancy any body but his own little Barbara.

There was a good deal of truth in what had been playfully said, touching the extended influence of the handsome young gondolier's eyes. They had caused many a heartache among the damsels of his acquaintance. He was by no means a flirt; and it was therefore hard upon him, that the liking of one among these damsels was so pertinacious, that no pointed indifference on his part, could suffice to discourage her from persecuting him with evidences of the attachment she felt. This girl, Nina, had all along made no secret of her hope, that by the constancy of her own passion, she should in time win him; and it was therefore with dismay that she learned he was not only still indifferent to herself, but that he had fallen in love elsewhere.

She now dogged his steps with no less pertinacity than before—though with quite a different motive. She had fully resolved rather to kill him than to see him wedded to another.

"Why delay it?" she muttered; "it must and shall be done; why then delay? Can I ever have better force than now, while the recollection of his scorn burns fresh within me? This is the very hour, I know, when he visits his minion. There, I shall make sure of him."

She glided swiftly along; making her way by some of the narrow alleys and passages that thread an obscure footway through Venice; until she reached the landing leading up into the corridor, at the back of Brabantio's palace. She made sure that the long gallery was empty; she sped along it, and concealed herself among the folds of a tapestry curtain, which was occasionally drawn across a doorway leading into the vaulted hall, but which now hung in dark heavy drapery on one side. Here she paused; her heart beating high; her breath held, but coming short and quick; her pulse throbbing; her feet contracted; her hands clenched.

Presently there was a light step; it came through the hall, and tripped along the corridor,—the person whose step it was, passing so close to Nina, as to brush the folds of tapestry that enveloped her. There were voices; a hurried meeting; a light word or two, exchanged for an anxious enquiry; and then Nina plainly heard the words:—

"No time for mocking jest, indeed! How pale you are, Paolo! And how hot and feverish your hands! Your lips are parched—you are ill!"

"I have been lounging too long in the heat, I believe, with my head uncovered; but never fear, Barbara; not quite a sunstroke! I'm only a little giddy—it will pass. Put your cool hand to my forehead—that will cure me in a trice."

"Stay, I will fetch you a draught of iced water; that will refresh you. I won't be gone many minutes."

The light quick footsteps came back; the figure repassed through the curtained doorway; and again, all but touched the hidden Nina.

"Now is the very moment! Now, Nina, nerve thy heart and hand for one sure blow!"

For one instant she looked forth. He was standing alone, partly turned from her, beside one of the long range of windows which gave light to the gallery on one side, overlooking the canal. He leaned against the embrasure, and had one hand raised to his head; his hair was put back from his face, and showed it wan and suffering.

Not allowing herself to note his look, she only perceived he was alone, and off his guard. Darting from her concealment, she made towards him; but whether some unconscious check to her speed had reached her in the glimpse she caught of his white face, or whether the space she had to traverse, afforded him some instant warning of her approach, he just had time to turn ere she attacked him. He caught at her upraised arm, and attempted to seize the knife from her; but she was desperate, and clutched it tight, and struck madly at his face with it. Twice he had tried to grasp her wrist, and both times she had twisted it from him, and thrust again at his throat—his face; until goaded by such pertinacious assault, he put forth his strength, and forced her to give back.

She stumbled against the open window—lost her balance—fell out, dropping the knife at his feet.

Horror-stricken he gazed out after her. He saw the head strike against the side of the gondola; and then, her body plunge into the water. Once again he beheld the face, as she rose to the surface. It was turned towards him with a look—one look—such a look!—it turned him to stone.

He remained there, hanging out of the window, unable to stir; his eyes staring from the sockets, and fixed upon the waters where they had closed upon the upturned face—his mouth agape and rigid—his arms nerveless—his body incapable of moving—powerless—helpless.

He was found thus by Barbara, when she returned with the draught of water.

On her approaching him, he did not turn towards her; he neither spoke, nor moved. In great alarm she addressed him, and besought him to answer—to look at her. At the sound of

her voice, he stared round vacantly, and then fixed his eyes with a mournful gaze upon hers. In piteous accents she implored him to speak—to tell her how it was with him; and then she pressed him to drink of the cool draught she had brought, to revive him.

He waved the glass from him; and with his eyes still mournfully fixed upon hers, he said:—"And so you would have me swallow that, would you, Nina? You cannot stab me—you would offer me poison, would you?"

He laughed a low unnatural laugh, that thrilled Barbara to hear.

"Dear Paolo!" she said soothingly; and would have laid her hand upon his arm; but the instant he felt her touch, he pushed her back roughly, and said, with sparkling eyes, "I would fain not hurt you—you're a woman; but do not tempt me—do not urge me too far."

"Dear, dear Paolo," again she said, weeping; "do you not know me? Will you cast off your own Barbara?"

"I know you, Nina; I know you! You cannot beguile me. I cannot love you—I tell you plainly—I can love none but Barbara!"

"I am Barbara—your own poor little Barbara. O Paolo! Do you not indeed know that it is I?"

She wrung her hands; and once more would have approached him to throw her arms about him, that she might strive to soothe him with those caresses, one of which he had so often vainly entreated, in some of their happy courting times, when she would play the sportive tyrant.

But again, the moment she attempted to touch him, he flung her from him; and this time with such violence, that she reeled, and could not help screaming aloud, with the fright and pain of receiving so heavy a blow from that hand.

"I warn you—keep back, Nina! Or I cannot answer for myself!" he exclaimed.

Just then, her brother Lancetto entered the corridor. He had of course heard nothing of Barbara's cry, but a glance at her disturbed countenance, and that of Paolo, told him that something fearful was the matter between them.

His sister hastily communicated to him, by means of the signs which were in use between them, that Paolo had been seized with a sudden illness, which seemed to bereave him of his senses; that he did not know her; that he took her for some one else.

Lancetto went towards the unhappy young man, and spoke some gentle words to him: Paolo seemed somewhat calmer at the lad's voice; but when Lancetto attempted to lead him towards Barbara, he drew back, shuddered, and pointing at her said in a hissing whisper:—"You don't know what she has done—she would have used her knife upon me; but it lies yonder; best pick it up, lest she recover it, and strike at me again."

Paolo quietly gave the knife into Lancetto's hand, still, however, maintaining an eye upon Barbara, saying:—"Keep it securely; let her not know where you hide it—and then we shall be safe from her. Come away; let's leave her; if she follow us, we'll use her own knife upon her. She shall not come between Barbara and me—I've told her so, plainly; let her not tempt me again."

Scowling upon the miserable girl, he drew her brother away; who, yielding to his movement, contrived to whisper to Barbara, that he would but lead Paolo home, and then return to comfort her.

But comfort there was never more to be for Barbara.

Nothing could divest the unfortunate Paolo of the impression he had first conceived after the shock his brain had undergone from that fatal accident, occurring as it did so immediately upon long exposure to the noonday sun. Nothing could do away with his conviction that Barbara was Nina; and he shunned her with no less abhorrence now, than he had formerly sought her with fondness.

This distempered fancy, and strange aversion of her lover, broke poor Barbara's heart. She bore it patiently, bravely, at first, trusting that he might yet recover. She would not yield all hope—until all hope was snatched from her. Her brother Lancetto, from the very first day of Paolo's distraction, had devoted himself to his friend; he took up his abode with

him; kept near him through the day; watched him through the night; and was indeed a brother to his sister's unhappy lover. But one night he had leaped into his boat, and disappeared over the dark waters.

After that night he was seen no more—he never returned; and after that night, Barbara never lifted up her head. She went about, a forlorn, dejected, listless creature. She, once so gay and chirping now slunk to and fro, joyless, hopeless—her heart had broken.

Her early merry tunes and happy airs were all forsaken; she never sang at all, save one plaintive old ditty that seemed to haunt her fancy; for she hummed it well-nigh incessantly; she crooned it in her sleep; she would let her spindle lie idly on her knee, while she gazed vacantly into the cloudless heavens, murmuring its simple burden of "willow, willow, willow;" and when the myriad brightness of stars shone forth in the blue depth of a Venetian night, Barbara's sad "willow, willow; sing all a green willow," would steal from her lips in faint despondent cadence.

She lacked neither attention nor sympathy. Her kind-hearted mistress, the lady Erminia, and the young Desdemona, left nothing untried, to comfort, to restore her.

But no kindness could console—no care restore; nothing could avail to revive the drooping girl. She literally pined to death before their eyes, still chanting, "willow, willow, willow."

This young girl's sorrow and untimely death made a profound impression on Desdemona. It saddened her to a degree, of which no less gentle a nature than hers would have been capable. She fell into a dejected spiritless mood, which alarmed her mother, who imparted her uneasiness to her lord, and besought his permission to take their child for a short time from a spot which was evidently fraught with too painful association for her young heart.

Brabantio caught his wife's alarm. He gave immediate orders for their removal to a villa he possessed on the Brenta, that change of scene might give a turn to the thoughts and daily

habits of his child. He appointed a proper retinue to attend the lady Erminia and her daughter thither; prescribed the establishment of a numerous household, in his usual style of pomp and magnificence; and promised to join his wife and daughter there, as soon as the affairs of state should permit his absence from Venice.

The prospect of change is seldom without its attraction for childish fancy; and already the thought of going to spend some time in a country-house with her mother, gave evident pleasure to the young Desdemona, and awakened a look of interest and expectation in her face, which it had not worn since poor Barbara's death.

In the beautiful villa Belvista, on the Brenta, Erminia spent some very happy time. She had the joy of seeing the bloom return to her daughter's cheek; the look of health revisited the face, and the lady felt that her child was spared to her.

But while her daughter grew in beauty, health and accomplishment, the lady Erminia gradually declined in strength: yet it was not until her daughter was on the verge of womanhood, that the lady Erminia died. When her hour came, it found her calm, peaceful, resigned. Her death was serene, gentle, as her own nature. She sank into rest. She slept, never more to awake.

Her mother's death was severely felt by Desdemona. But it produced no such effects as the shock of Barbara's early fate. Her character had since acquired the sobriety and calm of added years, as well as of holy teaching. Instead therefore of yielding to despondency, Desdemona strove to derive consolation from a more correct fulfilment of her duties; she devoted herself to her father's will and pleasure, and studied how she might best conduce to his happiness; she resumed those errands of charity and benevolence, which she had first learned to perform in the company of her beloved mother. She confided to no one her aspirations, her duteous endeavours; she found what comfort she could from them, but she savoured them silently, secretly, with no other guide than her own spirit of love and gentleness.

Her father had brought his daughter back with him from Belvista to Venice on the death of her so dear to them both. Now it was that he for the first time learned the full value of the treasure he had lost, and of the treasure his Erminia had bequeathed to him. In his child, Desdemona, he found renewed all those gentle virtues that distinguished her mother; and he grew to love her with a double love—for her own sake, and for hers of whom she reminded him.

But though he thus recognized and worshipped gentleness in the characters of his wife and daughter, his own nature gained nothing of corresponding suavity. He was still the same imperious Brabantio; proud, harsh, despotic. He was fond of his daughter for her attention and submission to him; he took pleasure in her beauty, her accomplishments; he was intensely conscious of her grace and loveliness; he indulged her in every desire she could form of taste or luxury. But he was as far as ever from any power of winning her confidence, or responding to the sympathies and hidden instincts of affection and imagination which lurked within her heart. She was hardly aware of them herself; but had she known them ever so palpably, she would all too surely have felt they could meet no response from him. What aspirations she was imperfectly conscious of, therefore, she locked close within her own thoughts, and let the only satisfaction they sought, be found in secret and in silence.

It might be, that she was swayed by a spice of that romance which had, in his youth, led her own father to take a sort of delight in the mystery attending his secret marriage with Erminia; certain it is, that, inherited or not, there was a strong tendency to the imaginative and the romantic, in Desdemona's disposition. Her fancy had always been strangely excited about that absent sailor-uncle of hers; his probable adventures had always possessed a singular charm of wonder and speculation for her mind, and had occupied many an hour of solitary musing. The fascination which all that presented food for her imagination had for her, might thus have been one source of the unobserved way in which she chose to pay her visits—both of piety and charity. But the main-spring of her reserved conduct, was undoubtedly, awe of her father.

One morning, soon after her return to Venice, Desdemona had gone forth to the old church close by. It was situated on the banks of a narrow, bye-canal, and was not many paces from the Brabantio palace; so that, plainly dressed and veiled, the lady could readily reach it unobserved.

She had been so engrossed with her devotions, that she did not remark a lad who was kneeling not far from the spot where she had taken her place; but when she arose, and passed near to where he still crouched upon the pavement, she looked upon the face more attentively; and saw that, however altered by illness and suffering, it was no other than Lancetto's.

She uttered his name in a tone of pity and surprise. The lad could not hear the sound; but he saw that he was recognized.

Desdemona, by signs, asked what had befallen, since he had left the Brabantio palace; expressing regret for the want and misery betokened in his looks; for, haggard eyes, pale cheeks, ragged clothing, spoke a plain tale.

He told her all his little history. How, upon his dismissal under Brabantio's displeasure, he had gone back to the old place where Paolo had lodged, and where he had watched and tended him in his distraction. How he had lingered there, reckless of what became of him, after being turned away from the only roof where he had known happiness; and how, that on creeping along by a low deserted mud-bank, skirting one extremity of the city, he had perceived an empty boat drifting along near in shore. That he had been struck with a look about the craft, which he thought he knew; that he had succeeded in drawing it to land; when, upon examination, he had recognized it surely for Paolo's boat, which he had first suspected it to be.

He went on to say, that, though the finding of the boat had occasioned him much grief,—as affording but too clear evidence of the fate of his friend,—yet that eventually it had furnished him with the means of livelihood; bare and scanty it is true, for there was great difficulty in getting any one to hire a gondolier who had the inconvenient misfortune of being deaf; but

still, by plying constantly, and endeavouring to recommend himself by patience and assiduity, he had contrived to ward off absolute famine.

One of Desdemona's first works of charity, was to establish this poor lad in comfort in the old lodging that had been his friend's; while she crowned his content, by herself using his gondola whenever she required transport to and fro on her benevolent visitations to the sick, and the afflicted. By this means, too, the privacy she so much desired, was ensured; for Lancetto could bring his gondola to the small water-entrance at the back of the palace; and Desdemona, muffled in the quiet black dress, veil, and mask, which formed the ordinary out-door dress of a Venetian lady, could step into the boat at any hour she chose, without attracting other observation than that of her own women, who were too much attached to their gentle mistress, and too well acquainted with her virtues, to doubt the propriety of anything she chose to do, even had not the dread in which they held the magnifico, her father, prevented their mention of any circumstance that took place in his household unknown to him.

But thus it happened, through the disposition of Brabantio, and the soft timidity of his daughter, that a clandestine air was given to actions not only perfectly innocent, but even virtuous and praiseworthy; and that one of the most pure of women insensibly allowed herself a kind of tacit deception, and equivocal procedure in conduct.

Very little short of an angel upon earth seemed this gracious lady to her faithful attendant, Lancetto, as he conveyed her about the city on her missions of beneficence. He looked at her with the reverence with which he would have gazed upon a saint, as she sat there beneath the black awning of the gondola, muffled in her black dress and veil, yet through all which seemed to pierce the radiance of her grace, her goodness, her benign beauty.

It is broad noon—the full meridian blaze of an Italian sun—when a squadron of noble war-galleys sail up the blue Adriatic, and cast anchor at the port of Venice. The fleet brings news

to the state, of recent conquest against the Turkish force; and soon, all is welcome and triumph. Among the crowds who are hurrying ashore from the vessels, there is one solitary man whom no one welcomes, no one hastens to meet. He is dressed like a Venetian naval officer; and as he prepares to quit the ship in which he has just arrived, he turns to wring the hand of the captain, with warm thanks for his aid since he redeemed him from captivity; he no sooner touches land than he quits it again for a gondola, desiring the boatman to convey him as speedily as may be to the Brabantio palace.

"You will do well, signior capitano, to use some little ceremonial in addressing yourself to the signior Brabantio, if you are not intimately known to him;" returned the gondolier. "The magnifico is high and mighty, and does not readily admit strangers to his presence without credentials of their deserving the honour. However, there are not wanting people who'll tell you he hasn't quite so much of the devil's graces,—pride and haughtiness,—as he used to have, before his wife's death. Santa Madre di Dio! What makes you turn so pale, signior capitano?" added the man, as he witnessed the effect of his last words upon the stranger's countenance.

Gratiano,—for it was no other than Erminia's long-absent brother,—now too surely learned the fact of his sister's recent death; and found that his return had been too late, by a few months only. So bitterly did he feel this severing of the only tie that bound him to Venice, that it seemed as if his redemption from captivity were valueless, now that she no longer lived, who would the most delightedly have hailed his return. He cared not to present himself at Brabantio's palace, but fed his grief by repeated visits to the church where Erminia's remains were deposited; and for some time her image solely occupied his thoughts.

On a certain evening after one of these mournful visits he was turning to leave the quiet church, when he perceived one figure still kneeling there. It was a lady, attired in black, and closely veiled; who seemed so completely abstracted, and absorbed in her private devotions, as to be unaware that every one else was retiring. He could not help lingering a moment,

in the half-formed hope of seeing her more nearly; but finding that she stirred not, he felt the indelicacy of staying to watch her, and withdrew.

He was surprised to find that the remembrance of this kneeling figure haunted him afterwards. He went for several successive days to the same church, but he never saw her there again. As he lingered near, a party of brother officers came by; who, seeing their comrade, hailed him, and asked him to go with them to a grand parade, to be held that morning in the Piazza St. Mark, whither they were all repairing. He declined; but they persisted.

"Come with us, man. All the world will be at St. Mark's—all the Venice world—her proudest nobles—her brightest ladies."

"Have with you, gentlemen!" exclaimed Gratiano, finding there were no other means of ridding himself of their importunity, than by accompanying them.

They were now full of the expected advent of their general, the warlike Othello, a noble Moor, high in the confidence and employ of the Venetian state.

Great preparations were making to receive the Moorish general with the honours due to one who had achieved accumulated renown to the state; and his officers were among those who expected his arrival with the greatest eagerness. In all this, Gratiano took the natural interest belonging to his profession. But his thoughts, do what he would, often reverted to the veiled lady, with a yearning inexplicable to himself.

And now took place the event to which all Venice had been eagerly looking forward. The Moorish captain, Othello, general in the army of the Venetian state, made his entry into the city. He was received from on board his galley, by the duke himself, and all the members of the senate. There was a public entertainment given in the open air, in St. Mark's place, at which the magnificos, the chief families, the most distinguished members of illustrious houses, and all the highest nobility of Venice were present, to welcome with due honour, the return of the victorious warrior.

In virtue of his naval rank, Gratiano was one of the guests.

In all that fair assemblage, as may be supposed, the individual who most attracted his attention, was the valiant Moor, Othello. He had heard of him at Rhodes, Aleppo, Cyprus, and other places, where his vicissitudes in the service of his country had taken him; and everywhere, he had heard the general spoken of with one accord, as truly noble, an accomplished soldier, a skilful commander, an honourable man, high in virtue as in renown. All that he now saw of the man's bearing went to confirm the character which fame had given him. He seemed noble among nobles; distinguished among the distinguished. By the side of even ducal magnificence, and senatorial greatness, he looked princely and majestic—heroic in soul, as in achievement.

Next to the Moor, there was another person who chiefly interested Gratiano. This was the senator, Brabantio; his brother-in-law. With what mingled sadness and pity did he look upon the face once so handsome, so fiery, so animated, which had won the heart of his sister Erminia, now worn, and thoughtful, with a furrowed brow, and a contracted lip; the hair, once bright and thick, now thinned, and greyish; the frame, before so erect—so full of energy, now somewhat bent, and enfeebled. Years had left their traces upon the haughty nobleman. At the thought, that it might be regret for Erminia, which had helped to effect this change in the person of her husband, her brother resolved that he would seek Brabantio in his own house, and would mourn her with him in kindness and sincere affection. Henceforth, they should be brothers.

There was another motive too, that drew Gratiano's heart towards him. Beside the magnifico sat a young lady of exquisite beauty, who, he felt could be no other than Erminia's child.

"And that supremely beautiful creature is my niece—my own niece!" was the thought that continued to fill him with pride and joy as he looked upon her.

"You are fascinated, signior, by the beauty of the lady Desdemona, signior Brabantio's daughter;" said an elderly gentleman, who happened to be close beside Gratiano, and observed the direction in which his gaze was fixed. "She certainly looks

transcendently lovely to-day in that satin robe of virginal white, and with those orient pearls hanging upon throat and arms not less pure in hue than themselves. I don't wonder at your admiration; it is shared by us all; young or old, it is just the same; we can none of us resist the charm of her beauty."

"But see, there is a stir among the group yonder;" said the old gentleman, interrupting himself. "The duke is presenting the general to some of his particular friends among the magnates of the state. Now he approaches signior Brabantio, and introduces the valiant Moor to him, and to his fair daughter. With what a modest sweetness she curtsies. No wonder the general looks upon her with such eyes of admiration. I told you so; we all do;—young or old—soldier or civilian—native or foreigner—fair or dark—it's all one; and the Moor, for all his swarthy cheek, and his warlike visage,—that has seen many a stormy year of siege and bloodshed, I take it—hath yet a fire in his gaze that shows neither years nor wars have blinded him to the beauties of a fair Venetian lady, when she stands before him in her full perfection, as she now does in the person of the divine Desdemona. You will smile at my raptures, signior; but in truth, the lady Desdemona is worthy of all enthusiasm."

"The lady is indeed a rare creature;" replied Gratiano.

And once more he repeated within himself—"and she is my niece—Erminia's child—my own niece!"

His eagerness to claim affinity with her, however, yielded to his disinclination to do it on so public an occasion as the present. He resolved to content himself with gazing upon her from a distance, as a stranger, for to-day; but on the morrow he promised himself, he would indemnify his patience under the delay, by seeking her and her father so early and so quietly, as should ensure to their meeting all the affectionate unreserve of privacy.

But that same night, as he was passing through one of the smaller canals, a boat approached his own; four men, armed and masked, leaped out upon him, bound, gagged, and blindfolded him, and then forced him into their boat, which they proceeded to push in silence from the spot; not many minutes

elapsed before the motion of the vessel ceased, and then Gratiano was guided to the edge of the boat, and forced to get out. He felt that he was conducted down some stairs. Then he heard the application of a key, the grating of a heavy door, through which he seemed to pass; then came a silent unbinding of his arms; and then, the withdrawal of the bandage from his eyes. He felt the men withdraw from around him, and then heard the re-closing of the heavy-grating door, succeeded by the turning of the key, which told him he was now alone.

The stories he had heard, of men mysteriously made away with, for a whim of state policy; the secret system of the Venetian tribunal; all now came into Gratiano's mind, and he could scarcely doubt but he was a victim to authorized tyranny, which made sinister accusation and arrest, summary condemnation and execution, a right of rule.

While these terrible suggestions crowded on his imagination, Gratiano heard a bolt drawn back, as if by a stealthy hand; then another; then the key tried, and unlocked; then the door pushed slowly open; and then in the space it left, stood a figure he well knew.

He recognized it instantly, though it was revealed only by the light of a small lamp, carried in the hand.

It was the lady in black. She was closely masked, and the folds of her veil fell thick and shroudingly round her figure, as usual. She spoke no word, but beckoned; signing Gratiano to follow her forth. He lost no time in obeying; and was about to utter some eager question, when she enjoined silence by placing her finger on her lip. His guide led the way along a gallery, up a winding stone-staircase. On reaching the summit of which the lady opened a door, and said in a whispered tone:—"You can proceed with safety alone, now, signior; go through the opposite entrance, leading out upon a landing-place. At the landing-place, you will find a boat ready to convey you to a place of safety. Farewell!"

Gratiano would have poured forth some expressions of gratitude; but, with her finger again and yet more impressively laid upon her lip, she murmured:—"Stay not to speak, I beseech

you, signior; every moment increases your peril—my own. Once more, farewell."

He reached the landing-place, as she had directed, and found the boat awaiting him. The gondolier, on seeing Gratiano appear at the low portal, started up, as if expecting him; and upon his stepping into the gondola, pushed off silently, as if in pursuit of previously-received orders. Gratiano could not resist the temptation of addressing a question to his gondolier, before they parted; but he received no other reply than a slight shake of the head, a shrug of the shoulders, and a look of expectation that he would land. He did so; and the gondola, with its silent gondolier, glided swiftly away.

The sun arose gloriously. As its beams put to flight the darkness of the past night, so did the thought of that interview which Gratiano had promised himself should take place on the coming morning, displace the recollection of the last few hours, and the events they had witnessed.

His reception by Brabantio was as full of cordiality as he could have desired; and he soon perceived that time had done nearly as much in softening the magnifico's manners, as it had wrought change in his appearance. He showed an affectionate pleasure at beholding one so dear to Erminia, and evinced regret that Gratiano had quitted them, by the warmth with which he greeted his return.

"Come hither, jewel;" said Brabantio to his daughter Desdemona, as she entered. "What wilt thou say to me, an' I give thee another father, who will love thee scarce less fondly than my foolish old self? We will make him so welcome, will we not, my girl, that he shall ne'er think of running away from us again. We will try and persuade him to give up a seafaring life, and sit down contented with us in our sea-girt city. Look upon this gentleman,—my brother Gratiano; and bid thy uncle, thy second father, welcome, Desdemon!"

His daughter advanced; the blood mantling in her cheek, as she murmured a few words of gentle yet earnest welcome. But low as the murmur was,—there was no mistaking that voice. Gratiano felt that the lady in black stood before him; that the

radiant beauty of the day before, in her virginal white and pearls,—and the mysterious figure, black-robed, veiled, and masked, were one and the same person.

"Your uncle has the advantage of us, my girl; he has seen us before; he tells me he saw us yesterday at the duke's feast. I wonder we did not note him among the guests. The signior capitano's is no figure to pass unobserved."

Desdemona uttered a few words of assent to her father's compliment; but she said nothing of having herself seen Gratiano before; and her uncle forbore to make any allusion to what she evidently did not intend mentioning. He could, however, see that she was no less aware than himself of their having previously met; for the colour of her cheek varied, and there was consciousness in her eye.

"But, I believe, we none of us, yesterday, had eyes and ears save for him, our victorious general;" continued Brabantio. "I have entreated him hither, as often as he will pleasure me with his visits. He has promised me to come to-morrow. Let thy ordering of the banquet for the occasion do credit to thy housewifery, good my daughter. The valiant Moor has done brave service to the Venetian state; and it is fitting her senators should show him all countenance and approval."

"My best care shall be given, to further your wish, my father;" she answered.

"And while we are on the subject of household discussion, gentle mistress," continued Brabantio, "see that the green and gold suite of apartments be appointed for the occupation of thine uncle Gratiano. He has consented to grant us his society, and take up his abode here altogether."

Gratiano had not long been domesticated with Brabantio and his daughter, ere he discovered that the softening in the magnifico's manner, was a softening of manner only; as long as nothing thwarted him, as long as he had his own will uncontradicted, he was all courtesy, affability, and bland condescension; but once cross his humour, or oppose his wishes, and he was as haughty, as irascible as ever. Gratiano perceived that this was the reason of his daughter's conduct. It was the origin of her silent acquiescence in whatever her father ad-

vanced; whether true or not, that mattered less, than that he should remain uncontradicted.

Gratiano told her how he had first seen her; how he had become interested in her, little thinking the tie which really existed between them.

And then, Gratiano drew from her an explanation of that mysterious night-adventure, when she had been his protectress, and rescuer from captivity.

He learned that she did not even know who the prisoner was. But that one of her women had informed her of what she had overheard from some of the retainers, about a man that was to be seized by order of signior Brabantio, and conveyed into one of the subterranean range of strong rooms belonging to the palace. That the girl had afterwards heard the man telling of a mistake that had been made in the person seized; that they determined to make farther search for the right man; and as for the poor devil who had been caught by mistake, he might remain where he was, quietly, as he could tell no tales through stone walls, that would reach signior Brabantio's ears. That on hearing this from her scared damsel, Desdemona had determined to take upon herself the quiet evasion of the prisoner; and that since, she had been much diverted by the girl's report, of how the men had found the captive escaped, the untouched locks and bolts on the outside of the dungeon door plainly indicating that he owed his rescue to the intervention of the Madonna, or to his own wicked dealings with the infernal powers.

As they conversed, Brabantio entered the apartment, bringing with him the Moorish general, Othello; who was now a frequent visitor at the senator's palace.

The conversation fell, as was usually the case, upon the general's adventures; Brabantio loving to hear him relate them, as often as he could draw Othello upon the theme.

Gratiano listened, too, with interest, to a history delivered by its own hero, with as much modesty as eloquence; and he thought he could perceive that his niece was a no less attentive hearer than either her father or himself.

She would sit at her embroidery-frame in the window, while

he conversed with her father and uncle; but the latter observed, that as the story proceeded, her needle would forget its office, and the stitch remain unset, until some perilous circumstance, or hair-breadth escape were passed;· and that then a sigh of relief accompanied the suspended drawing through of the silk. He noticed too, that if anything occurred to interrupt the discourse she would ingeniously contrive to bring it back to the same subject; or if, by chance, called forth herself, by some domestic duty, she would return in so short a space of time, as plainly bespoke her eagerness to lose no word.

Yet notwithstanding that he discovered these tokens of the interest which Desdemona took in the conversation of her father's guest, her uncle did not see that she showed any particular favour or attention to that guest himself. He noticed that she was more shy, more distant, when Brabantio was by; that she insensibly became less frank and artless before him. To have seen her bid good morning to the Moor on his arrival, or say farewell on his departure, the lady might have been thought almost to feel repugnance towards him, so shrinkingly and tremblingly she curtsied, so reluctantly her hand seemed to meet his; and yet, when seated behind her father's chair, at her embroidery-frame, there was a colour in her face, a warmth and glow of interest in her very silence, that told the avidity with which she devoured every word that was falling from the speaker's lips.

These evidences of imperfect sincerity, of a want of candour in the character of the otherwise perfect Desdemona, gave her uncle inexpressible pain. He could but too well account for them. He saw, that the overbearing temper of Brabantio had induced this undue timidity in his daughter; had taught her a shrinking terror of giving offence, which almost inevitably degenerated into dissimulation. By tenderness, by confidence, the gentle Desdemona might have been won to extreme of openness and sincerity. As it was, that one fatal defect but too certainly existed.

Once, at taking leave, her timid withdrawal had been so obvious, on the general's respectfully saluting her hand, that the

moment his guest was gone, her father rallied her upon her coyness.

"Why, I fear me, Desdemon, thou hast inherited more than a fair share of that pride which has always been imputed as an attribute of our house. And so, thy noble Venetian blood recoiled from granting a favour to a barbarian, did it? But let me tell thee, gentle mistress, for all thy lily hand disdained to linger within that dusky palm, it is a brave hand, a prevailing hand, one that has wielded its good sword right valiantly in the service of thine own Venice, and therefore is deserving of favour from all her fairest ladies. Nevertheless, I had rather see thee over-proud than over-free to any one, my girl; it sorts best with our family feeling or failing, whichever they will have it to be. Brabantio's daughter cannot hold herself too high to please her old father—well thou know'st that."

And thus was Desdemona's course of conduct confirmed.

Months flew by; and still Gratiano thought that he could see growing proof of the difference he perceived in his niece's conduct to the Moor, and her feeling towards him.

"Yet why, after all, should I fear to find that she has bestowed her regard upon such a man?" mused Gratiano. "I believe, it is chiefly, in dread of the rage, the grief, which would be her father's, on the discovery that his fair child had given her heart to this Moor. And am I sure that it is so? May not my surmise be false—utterly baseless?" He approached their usual sitting-room, where he had left Brabantio, his daughter, and their guest.

When he entered the apartment, however, he at first thought it empty; but presently he perceived Desdemona there, alone, leaning amongst the folds of a curtain that draperied the window which led out into a balcony over-hanging the grand canal. She was not looking forth; her eyes were fixed upon a curiously-wrought handkerchief that she held in her hand, and more than once pressed to her lips in a fond, passionate manner. Her eyes gave evidence that she had been weeping; but there was that in their expression, which told of deep-seated happiness, far more eloquently than the brightest lustre that had ever sparkled in them. A slight noise he made, attracted her

attention, and he saw her hastily conceal the handkerchief among the folds of her robe. Shortly after, on some slight pretext, she herself withdrew.

And yet once again he saw her caress this same handkerchief. She was sitting bending over her embroidery-frame, with her back towards him, as he entered; and he had advanced some feet within the room, before she heard the approaching step. Then she thrust the kerchief into the case which held her coloured silks; but not before the curious arabesques of the flowered border, and the strawberries spotted over the centre, had shown her uncle, that it was the one he had before beheld.

Had he not seen this,—had he not witnessed these endearments, lavished in secret upon a token which he could not but associate with the Moor, as his gift, from its oriental look, and yet more from the fondness with which Desdemona regarded it, —Gratiano would have been more surprised than he actually was, upon being, one night, hastily aroused from his bed, and hearing that his brother was distracted with the news that his child was gone; that Desdemona had fled from her father's house; that it was whispered, she had left the palace secretly, with the Moorish general; that it was reported she was married to Othello.

All this news, disjointedly poured into his ear, as he hurried on his dress, seemed to reproach him with having taken part in her clandestine act, by preserving silence so long. He hastened to his brother, but found that Brabantio had already left the palace; that the senators were assembled in council; that there was a talk of sudden and warlike preparation against the Turks.

Amidst all these flying rumours, there was one that caught Gratiano's ear, and caused him to hasten to the Sagittary. It was here that Othello, and the other military then in Venice, were stationed; and here, it was said, he had conveyed his new-made wife.

Gratiano reached the Arsenal, just as Desdemona was being conducted from the Sagittary, by order of the senate, to the ducal palace. Her uncle hastened to give her the support of his presence. She looked pale, but collected; and as if resolved to assume her utmost firmness.

On her entering the assembly of senators, the duke spoke; then her father; and then her uncle heard her soft voice—gentle and low, but wonderfully calm, as if she willed it not to tremble—utter these words:

"*My noble father,*
I do perceive here a divided duty:
To you, I am bound for life, and education;
My life, and education, both do learn me
How to respect you; you are the lord of duty,
I am hitherto your daughter. But here's my husband;
And so much duty as my mother show'd
To you, preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor, my lord."

OTHELLO, Act i. Sc. 3.



TALE V.

MEG AND ALICE; THE MERRY MAIDS OF WINDSOR.

"HAVE ye heard the news, mother?" said a girl about twelve years old, bouncing through the open door of a cottage where sat her parents, gaffer and gammer Quickly; "have ye heard that mistress May and mistress Gay have both been brought to bed this morning—and that they have a goodly girl apiece?"

"Girls; pshaw!" ejaculated John Quickly.

"And why shouldn't they be girls, if they like it, John? And why shouldn't girls be as good as boys?" asked Gilian, his wife; "I know you were like one wood, when ye learned that your own children were both wenches; but for my part I'd never ha' changed our Nell and Poll for any knave-bearn of them all."

"In the first place, boys can work; and girls are of no use;" quoth John.

"Of no use! Can't they be good housewives, John?" asked his wife.

"Can be? Ay. But are they? eh? Seldom, I wot;" grumbled John. "There's our Nell. What did she do, trow? —but as soon as she grew to be a likely wench in her teens, wasn't she teen enough to me? Wasn't she always gadding about, running after the fellows, and never content, till she got her cousin Bob Quickly to marry her? And now haven't they set off to London to get their living there? And much good I've got out of my eldest girl, haven't I?"

"Why, I think she's done very well, John; she might ha' done worse;" said the philosophic Gilian. "She's married the lad of her choice; she's gone up to London, to live among ladies, if she is not a lady herself. Didn't Jem Wainrope, the waggoner, bring us word that they've taken a tavern in East-cheap, and that they've called it the Boar's Head; and that they're like to drive a thriving trade there?"

"Ay, that's all very well for them; but what's the good of it to me?" growled gaffer Quickly. "If Nell be making her fortune as a hostess in London, that don't do me any service here, in Windsor, do it, wife?"

"Well, there's our Poll left to us, John," said gammer Quickly; like many another philosopher, shifting her ground, when she found herself worsted in one part of the argument; "there's our Poll; I'll warrant her, she'll never leave her old father and mother; but stay and take service in Windsor, if we get her a good place, won't ye, Polly?"

"I'll tell ye what, wife," said John Quickly, interrupting whatever reply his daughter might have been about to make; "it's my notion that our Poll is going on, much the same road that her sister Nell took. Good housewife, quotha? I see little of the good housewife about her, as yet; nothing that'll get her a good place, or fit her for useful service. I see nought but flitting hither and thither; gossiping with neighbours; idling away her mornings; chattering away her afternoons; busybodying, prating, meddling and making in everybody's concerns. There isn't a bride-ale, or a burial; a harvest-home or a sheep-shearing; a Christmas revel, or Hock-holiday, that our Poll doesn't take good care to be among the foremost in them; Plough-Monday, Shrove-Tuesday; May-morning, Mid-summer-eve; Whitsuntide, Martlemas, Candlemas,—all's one to Poll; she'll take right good heed not to lose a single chance for gossipry, and idling of any sort; and how's she to learn good housewifery in all that play-making, I should like to know?"

"Our Poll's but young, John;" said his wife; "she'll be steadier by and bye; won'tee, Polly?"

"To be sure, mother;" replied the daughter. "But you

haven't heard the best part of my news yet. Farmer Gay and Farmer May are about to give their christenings together, that there may be a right goodly feast, to do honour to their two little girls; and every body's to be bidden to't; and there's to be such holiday doings as never were known in Windsor before, at a farmer's table, they say."

"I know'd it was a holiday o' some sort that had set our Poll agog in this way;" said gaffer Quickly.

"And so there's to be a grand feast, is there?" added he presently.

"Ay truly, is there, father;" said Polly; "and you know, well as I love a morris-dance, a mumming, a May-pole measure, or a game of barley-break, where I may lighten my heels and my spirits, footing it or sporting it away by the hour together, you are to the full as content with a holiday that promises plenty of good fare and humming ale."

"I ben't churlish," grunted John; "I shan't refuse to go to the christening."

"If we're asked, John;" said his wife. "You know we ben't such well-to-do folks as the Gays, or the Mays either."

"I know that, fast enough, wife, without your 'minding me on't; but that's the way with you women; a man's never inclined to be jolly, and sociable like, and willing to take you out for a bit of pleasure, but you're sure to damp him with some of your confounded meeknesses, or prudences, or nonsenses of some kind or another, that none of us wants to hear."

"But mayhap they will ask us;" said Gilian; "for Poll says all Windsor's to be there. And more nor that, Poll's main clever at getting asked to every merry-making she has a mind to go to, and——"

"And that's to every one of 'em;" growled John.

"And so," continued his wife, regardless of the interruption, and anxious to make up for the ill-timed remark which had roused her husband's ungracious mood; "and so, our Poll shall manage to get us asked to the christening, as well as herself. Step up to farmer Gay's, child, and see if they want any one to hold the baby; or to farmer May's, and see if they need help for Joan cook. They'll be busy enow, I'll warrant me, at

both houses, just now, to make a handy girl like you, quite a treasure to 'em. Run, Poll."

And Poll Quickly went; and Poll Quickly contrived so well, she was so zealous, and so busy, and so at every body's beck and call, during the time of preparation, when all hands were in request at the farm-houses, that it was soon an understood thing, that her father and mother as well as herself were to be among the guests at the christening.

For the company included almost all grades, from the substantial yeomen,—among which class were the two hosts themselves,—down to the labourers and hinds that were employed on their farms. Indeed there were not wanting, to grace the feast, personages of a still higher rank, who vouchsafed the honour of their presence on this festive occasion. There was a neighbouring franklin or two,—wealthy country gentlemen, who, with their wives, thought it not beneath their dignity to appear among the train of guests assembled by such respectable townsmen as farmer Gay and farmer May. There was the London merchant, whose dealings for wools and fleeces brought him into communication with farmer Gay. There was the great metropolitan corn-factor, whose accounts for wheat and barley, and oats, and beans, were considerable with farmer May. There were a few smart foplings and fine city gentlemen, now in attendance on the court staying at Windsor, who thought it worth while to give the distinction of their presence, in return for the entertainment of a rustic feast on a scale of rather unusual magnitude. There was the good curate, Sir Paul Pureton; the worthy schoolmaster, Peter Scriven; the burly brewer, Ralph Barleybroth; the merry maltster, Nat Kilnby; the roaring butcher, Dick Cleaveholm; the hearty miller, Guy Netherstone; the little barber, Will Patterly; beside many other townsfolk, and numerous country acquaintances for some miles round about Windsor, together with labourers, hinds, farm and household servants, and their respective friends and gossips, forming a goodly company in all.

In order that fitting respect should be paid to those guests of superior rank who had honoured the feast by their presence, a temporary dais was fitted up at one end of the large hall where

the tables were laid, and a cross board was spread for their especial accommodation, while the boundary salt-cellar was placed on each of the lateral ones; but for the most part, ease, good-humour, frank and friendly bearing towards each other, was the order of the day; mutual kindliness, warmth, and heartiness of manner prevailed. Where so much mirth and good cheer abounded, there seemed no room for stiffness, haughtiness, or pride; they seemed by general consent to be banished, and genial fellowship to be convoked in their stead, that nothing might be wanting to the perfect enjoyment of the whole company. The stout oak tables, were far too stout, and too English of heart, to groan beneath the burden of good things with which they were laden; but they well-nigh split with laughing, and cracked their sides, at the heaps of substantial dainties which were piled, and close-jammed, and wedged together, with not a hair's-breadth space between, in pitiless profusion upon their broad plane. Dish after dish smoked upon the board; and still dish after dish came smoking along the hall, borne by grinning trencher-men, handed by red-cheeked damsels, and placed in endless succession upon the tables.

First came the lordly boar's head with the lemon in its mouth, racy and piquant; then the noble sirloin of beef garnished with boughs and rosemary; haunches of red and fallow deer; sucking-pigs fed daintily on dates and muscadine, and stuffed with rich puddings; capons, barn-door fowls, turkeys, geese, and boiled mallards; a shield of brawn with mustard; roasted neat's tongue, and chine of beef; a goodly and christian gammon of bacon, that no suspicion of Jewish taint might be there. Nor was the cook's skill wanting in the various dishes of quaint device; as the red herring o' horseback, wherein her craft had shown the likeness of a rider galloping away through a green field, which was cunningly represented by a corn salad; pies of divers kinds, as warden-pie, olive-pie, pippin-pie, mince-pie, and baked chewets; hog-liver puddings, veal-toasts, carponadoes, pamperdy, links, fritters, tansies, and quelques-choses; jumbals, leach-lombards, custards, or dowsets; suckets, wet and dry; March-pane, sugar-bread; jellies of all colours, marmalades, and florentines; as well as juncates,

and dainty confections, spiced and richly sweetened, of quinces, pomegranates, oranges, and other fruits, with cream or sugar.

That all space might be given to the dishes, the various drinks were placed on a sideboard, whence the guests were supplied with whatsoever they might choose to call for. There were generous wines of many vintages; those quaffed plain in their native excellence,—from the foreign luxuries of princeliest sack of Xeres, strong sacks of Canary and Malaga, and rich muscadine, to the home-made delicacies of Ypocras, Clary, and Bracket; those concocted, to suit other palates; some sweetened with sugar; some seasoned with lemon and spices; some brewed into possets, with eggs; the two kinds of raisin-wine, brown and white bastard; with good store of distilled liquors, such as rosa-solis, and aqua-vitæ. Ale and beer were in profusion; from the stately March ale, to simple small beer; there was double beer, double-double beer, mum, and dagger-ale; there was the popular huffcap ale, dear to the common lip by such familiar titles as "mad-dog," "angel's food," and "dragon's-milk." These different malt drinks were also to be found choicely compounded, as well as the wines; spiced and sugared, with a toast floating,—warm, and mellow, and cordial. There was not absent the favourite bowl of spicy nut-brown ale, called Lamb's wool, with its bobbing, hissing, roasted crabs, or apples, and the sprig of rosemary to stir and impart a flavour. The fruity beverages of cider and perry, were there for those who chose them; and though the honey-made metheglin had fallen into disrepute, some calling it "little better than swish-swash," yet as a Welsh family of the name of Evans had lately come to settle at Windsor, and were expected to be present, it was thought well to have metheglin provided, out of due regard to the well-known national predilection.

The feast was at its height; the dishes were all set on table; the door that had so frequently opened and given to view the busy cook and her helpers, the roaring fire, the laden spits, the steaming pans, the whole paraphernalia of the glowing kitchen, was now closed; the trencher-men and damsels ceased going and coming across the hall with dishes, and confined their attention to the tables, round which they perpetually hovered,

leaning over the backs of the guests, reaching platters, handing trenchers, serving drinks; carving, helping, pouring wine, frothing ale; now jesting, and laughing, with the guests, when they good-humouredly addressed some facetious remark to them; now shouting and bawling directions to each other. At its height was the jingling of glass and china, and the clinking of silver flagons and goblets, and tankards, at the dais-table; at its height was the clatter of pewter platters, and dishes, and measures, of wooden trenchers, of beechen cups, of treen ladles, of horn spoons, at the long tables,—especially below the salt, for noise is inseparable from enjoyment among the less well-bred; at its height was the mirth and uproar of the feasters, when Poll Quickly said to her father and mother,—or rather screamed to them, for it was as difficult to make a person hear amid all that riot and confusion, as the remark was safe from chance of reaching the ears of any one but him or her immediately addressed:—"Said I not sooth, father, when I told ye 'twould be a brave feast?"

"Ay, ay, brave enough! It's well for a farmer to get on thus in the world. Lord warrant us! See the china dishes, and the silver goblets, and the pewter service, that have taken the place of the treen platters and plain gear that would ha' served an honest man's turn in my young days, e'en at the upper end of the table; now, they must needs be used but by us below the salt," grunted John, though he was compelled to growl a little above his usual key that he might be heard in reply.

"O, but most part o' they fine things, the plate, and the china, and the glass, are borrowed from their great friends," said Poll Quickly; adding, with all the precision of a gossip proud of the accuracy of her information, "the parcel-gilt flagon came from Sir Mark Pursey's; the six tankards from Arden Hall; that great china charger was lent by lady Fragilhurst; and the cut-glass goblets, and biggest salt-cellar by——"

"I care not whence they came, nor who lent 'em, lass;" said her father; "I can see well enow that the Gays and the Mays are rich and well to do, setting aside the finery of the tables."

"The pewters's all theirs, I know for surely;" persisted Poll; "dishes, platters, bowls, spoons, all the whole service, for

I helped to scour and brighten it myself; they use it every day; the treen set, and the horn spoons are only for the servants. But just look at Mistress Barleybroth, mother! There's a coif and pinners! Flanders lace; no less, I assure you! And see what a flaunting ship-tire Lady Pursey wears! Ribbons enow to stock a mercer's booth! And only see that gaunt lad, the Welshman's son, Hugh. They say he's a parlous scholar, and knows all sorts of Latin and Greek; it is thought that if he goes on as he's begun, he'll be fit to do both Sir Paul Pureton's work, and Peter Scriven's, together,—priest and schoolmaster in one. If he's as sprag at learning, as he is at eating, marry, I'll ensure him the place, when time comes for the two old men to die, and leave him to stand in their shoes. Do but look at the lumps he puts in his mouth! It's like loading a hayloft. There's trusses of beef and salad for you! Mighty different to Will Patterly! He can't eat for watching everybody else. He keeps as fidgetty a look out as a bird pecking grain! But he's a good soul; he has only one fault; he prates too much."

At this moment, a loud voice rang thro' the hall, enjoining silence; and then the principal guest, who was one of the sponsors, arose, and proposed a toast to the health of the two mothers, Mistress Gay, and Mistress May; and then the other godfather arose, and proposed that health, happiness, and long life to the two new-made christians should next be drunk; and then amidst the waving and doffing of hats (for it was at that time esteemed no ill-breeding to sit covered during meal time) the toasts were pledged and drunk with hearty good wishes and much enthusiasm.

And then, the two babes themselves were brought in, wrapped in their white chrisom-cloths, looking very red-faced, and staring, as if wondering at their baptismal honours; and then, the twelve apostle-spoons, given to little Margaret Gay by her godfather, and the four evangelist-spoons, with a silver-gilt cup, given to little Alice May by hers, were handed round for the inspection and admiration of the company. And then, once again, all became uproar and clamour of tongues and utensils; laughing and jesting, and eating and drinking, proceeded as before.

Next succeeded singing, and merry tale-telling, flirting, gos-

siping ; and then the tables were cleared, that dancing, and sportive games, and all the more active species of merry-making might conclude the day. At a late hour, well pleased, the company broke up ; and, for long after, the christening of Margaret Gay and Alice May, was cited as one of the most notable amongst remembered Windsor festivities.

Master Ford was a thriving lawyer of Windsor. He made round sums, and put them by carefully ; so that he grew to be very rich ; and men said he deserved his gains, for they were made not only cleverly, but honestly. He resolved that his eldest boy, Frank, should have the advantage of a university education, that he might be fitted for following his own profession, or any other he might prefer.

Master Page was a substantial yeoman ; he was bailiff to Sir Marmaduke Ducandrake, who owned the finest estate thereabouts. It was whispered that he was worth a mint of money, and that he could have bought his employer over and over again ; for Sir Marmaduke was a spendthrift and a gambler.

Master Page was no less able than his neighbour master Ford to have sent his son to the university ; but the worthy agriculturist resolved that George should be nothing more nor less than a farmer, like his father before him.

Frank Ford was not a little proud of the distinction conferred by his father's determination to send him to college. His young Windsor friends thought he gave himself airs upon it, and that he treated them a little cavalierly, when he returned home for the vacations ; but George Page, his warm friend, maintained that Frank was the same good fellow as ever. Not so, Margaret Gay and Alice May,—who thought their former playmate had no right to assume the tone of superiority, which they chose to discover in him.

"I've no patience with him, I declare!" said Margaret Gay, "A puffed-up jackanapes! A conceited puppy! To give himself such airs!

"How you rave, Meg!" said Alice, smiling.

"I'll not rave more than I'll brave;" said Meg. "I'm determined I'll plague him for his boy-pedantry,—ridiculous in a young fellow like him, with scarce more down on his lip,

than you or I have. Let me see; let me see; I'll get Hugh Evans, the young Welshman, to write out my script for me—and I'll get Polly Quickly to bear it. Yet stay, that won't do either—he knows her, and will suspect something—maybe, question her; and her magpie tongue will blab all out. No, no, I'll trust no one but myself. Let me see; let me see."

Next evening, as Frank Ford was sauntering down a close lane, that was thick embowered with hedge-rows of hawthorn, dog-rose, briony, and brambles, with many a peeping fox-glove, harebell, and cowslip beneath, and many a fair young towering oak above; suddenly there dropped at his feet a green ball, of moss, grass, and twigs, curiously enmeshed and intertwined, that looked like two birds' nests joined together.

Frank picked it up. "A fairy-favour!" he exclaimed half-aloud; but looking, as he spoke, among the branches overhead, and through the hedge that skirted the lane, to see what mortal hand had thrown it there.

He began mechanically to untwist some of the fibres of grass and withy, that compacted the ball; and, to his surprise, perceived that it contained a scrap of parchment, upon which were inscribed odd crooked characters, which after some careful decyphering, he found to run thus :—

> If you'd find a marv'llous treasure,
> Book of lore and wond'rous pleasure;
> By to-morrow's earliest sight,
> In Windsor Park, by cock-crow light,
> Beneath the moss-grown beech's root,
> (Mark'd with crosses three its bark),
> Firm of heart, of hand, of foot,
> Dig from sunrise until dark.

"Pshaw!" said Frank; "how should this be? A book; buried beneath a tree! Are there indeed such fairy-gifts? Our Windsor Park is said to be the haunt of beings more than mortal. If such a book be there in truth, 'twere well worth the digging for."

At night, when he laid his head upon the pillow, his last thought was:—"What if I were to go there, and see the place? No harm in that. I'll sleep upon it."

He woke before the dawn. "I'll go look for the tree, at all

events, and see whether it bear the three crosses." He arose; but before he left home, he took a spade from an out-house. He shouldered it, and thought:—"Nobody will know of my folly, even I should have the folly to put so much faith in this scroll, as to use my spade." Passing master Page's farm in his way to the forest, he encountered George, who was up, with his father, looking after the men, and setting them to work.

"Is that you, Frank?" said George; "whither away so early?"

"Hush! never mind; now you have seen me, come with me, if you will;" said Frank; "I've got something in hand, that I care not should be talked of by thy father's hinds, and so get over half Windsor."

He walked on, saying no word more. When he reached the forest, he plunged into the thick of the trees, and still walked on.

"What seek you? A coney, a hare, or a squirrel?" said George Page, laughing, and striding after Frank. "Or is it a buck-royal that you have come hither to knock o'the head with that spade, and so bring me with ye to bear part of the blame of deer-stealing?"

"Pr'ythee, peace;" said Frank, peering about among the boles of the trees.

They had reached a tangled thicket; far and wide reputed as a fairy-haunt. In the midst stood a venerable, moss-grown beech-tree, hollow with age, and but few leaves left fluttering on its rugged arms. The rising sun sent its penetrating beams through the neighbouring oaks, and elms, and beeches; and, as the stream of light fell on this centre grand old tree, three crosses were distinctly visible, carved upon its smooth trunk.

"By the mass, there they are!" exclaimed Frank.

"What, are where?" said George, amazed at his friend's excited manner.

For all answer, Frank pointed to the three marks; thrust the bit of parchment into George's hand; hastily threw off his doublet; and began digging vigorously.

George examined the queer characters of the script; spelt them over and over; and then said:—"I'm no great scholar,

but I can make enough out, to find that you're digging in hope of a promised book."

"Just that;" said Frank, lustily continuing his labour, though it made the beads stand upon his brow.

"You're less accustomed to handle a spade than a pen, Ford;" said George; "give it to me, and let's see how many spits I can heave to your one."

Frank Ford was about to yield the spade: when he suddenly resumed plying it, as eagerly as before.

"Laugh at me if you will;" said he; but I'm determined to carry out this adventure myself; who knows but the charm consists in being worked out by him alone, who's destined to find the book?"

A very soft titter,—scarce more than the twitter of a young bird, might have been heard at this moment; but it was unheeded by either Frank or George.

"You have faith in the charm, then?" said George. "I thought you book-men held fairies and fairy gifts to be little better than old wives' tales."

"I hardly know what I believe;" said Frank; "the more we scholars learn, the less we rely upon our own wits. However, I'm resolved in this search I'm about, e'en if I dig here till set of sun."

The soft titter trilled forth once more; while Frank continued to throw out spadeful after spadeful of earth from the hole,—which was by this time pretty deep,—as if he had been tossing linen out of a basket; for, sooth to say, he was more impetuous than skilful.

George Page stood watching him; turning over the bit of parchment and considering. Suddenly he said.—Frank, what's the day of the month?"

"I know not,—neither do I care;" said Frank Ford hastily, digging away as strenuously as ever.

"But it may make some difference in your charm, you know;" said George, slily. "I do believe, it's the first day of April!"

The spade dropped from Frank Ford's hand; he stood aghast, up to his knees in the hole he had dug; while there was an un-

controllable burst of tittering, as if a whole brood of young birds were clamouring in their nest for food.

George Page put his finger on his lip, as he looked at his friend, and then stepped close to the beech-tree.

"I've found the fairies," cried he, peeping and discovering,—as he expected,—the crouching forms, and laughing faces of the two merry maidens, Meg and Alice; "but since they've been pleased to play their elvish tricks upon us, we'll not let them pass without paying the penalty—a kiss a-piece; shall they, Frank?"

"A kiss is the least I deserve for my hard digging," said Frank Ford, leaping out of the pit, and placing himself beside George to prevent the escape of their rogues of prisoners.

"Let's promise the kiss a-piece, and trust to our fingers for ridding us, by the exchange of a box o' the ear each;" whispered Alice to Meg. "Come, come; let us pass," she added aloud.

"Well then, you promise?" said the two youths.

"Yes, yes; we promise, of course;" said the girls; but the instant they had both got clear of the hollow tree, they took to their heels, and would have scampered off scot-free; had not Frank and George,—half prepared for such an attempted cheat,—caught them before they had run many paces. Then a scuffle ensued, such as the prize in question generally brings about between rustic lads and lasses. There was much struggling, and cuffing, and bending of waists, and bobbing of heads, on the part of the girls, to avoid the clasping arms, and adventurous lips that sought a victory; the which gained, the girls darted off.

The next time the young people met, George Page said: "Pray come, all of you, to father's; he bade me bring as many of the lads and lasses of Windsor, as I could muster, this evening, to our old barn; where we're to have an Easter-tide dance and supper. So you, Frank, take Meg and Alice there, while I go beat up for more guests, who have heels as light as their hearts. We'll have a merry night on't!"

During that evening's revels, the young scholar, Frank Ford, attached himself almost wholly to the side of Alice May.

When the coloured eggs, proper to this holiday season, were handed round, he presented her with some as a keepsake; he secured her as his partner in well-nigh every measure they danced; he ministered to her plate at supper, he pledged her in the foaming nut-brown ale; he drank out of the glass from which she had sipped; and while showing her all these attentions, he found himself thinking of the sweet fairy-favour he had won from that rosy lip of hers, in the early April morning among the old park trees. "She has the blithe humour of the simple country-girl, with the refined look and air of a high-bred maiden;" thought he; "she might have been born a lady, and would do honour to the choice of a gentleman. What a wife she will make for a man of taste and breeding, in a few years' time!"

Meanwhile, George Page had been indulging somewhat similar ruminations with regard to Margaret Gay. "What a frank, free-hearted creature she is!" thought he. "What a good-humoured, comely face, she has! What a joyous laugh! What a happy husband she would make of him she might love! What a cheerful, hopeful companion, what a true friend would he have in such a wife!"

Next day, Meg and Alice were chatting together over their spinning-wheels, which they had brought out into the porch of farmer Gay's house.

"Tell me, Meg, is this true, I hear that mistress Barleybroth asked your good mother whether she thought you could love her son Ambrose.

"Yes, yes, it's true enough;" said Margaret Gay, laughing; "true enough that young master Ambrose was too sheepish to court for himself, and so got his mother to get him a wife ready-wooed."

"Then you wouldn't have him?" said Alice.

"Have him? What should I do with him, when I had him? Set him to mind father's geese?—or to hold my distaff? But even these offices, I fear me, would prove beyond him. A young fellow that hasn't courage to look a girl in the face, or wit to tell her his liking, would let the geese stray, and the flax tangle."

"Poor Ambrose!" laughed Alice.

"But see who comes here! That tattling gossip, Poll Quickly."

"A fair evening, and a many of 'em, to the two merry maidens of Windsor;" said Poll, approaching the porch; "the wheel flies swift, and the yarn lengthens, when spinning is done out of doors such evenings as these, and by such fingers as those."

"Hast thou been among the courtiers, up at the castle, good mistress Poll, that thou hast learnt such flattering words?" asked Alice.

"Nay, I flatter not; I but repeat what others say, when I avouch that the two merry maids have fingers both nimble and fair;" said Poll. "And as for gill-flirting among the courtiers up yonder, I protest, as I'm an honest maid, I'm above such doings. No, all can be said of Poll Quickly is, that she minds her modest calling of barmaid, and does its duties soberly, I thank Heaven for it."

"Thou still keep'st thy place at the Star Inn, then?" said Margaret Gay.

"Ay, that I do, i'faith;" replied Poll; "though hard's the softest words I have there, and heavy's the lightest work I have, Lord knows! Up with the lark, and down with the lamb, is my latest lying-abed, I'll warrant ye. At work by cock-crow, and only half done by the time the chickens go to roost, is my daily labour. A bar-maid at the Star has her hands full, I can tell ye; and the place isn't a bed stuffed with pullet-down."

"But who do you think I've just parted with, in the fields, yonder?" continued Poll Quickly, who had crossed her arms leisurely on the top of the wicket-gate, a few paces from the porch where Meg and Alice sat, and had evidently taken up her position for a lounging talk; "I'll give it ye in ten, I'll give it ye in twenty—though two you'll not guess, ere you hit upon's name, I warrant me. Well, Heaven be praised, young men will be comely, and young women will have eyes; and so for the matter of that, have young farmers; and a keen eye, and a handsome eye he has, and a roguish eye for a pretty girl, I'll be his surety."

"Of whom art thou talking?" said Margaret.

"Lord, lord! to see how crafty-modest young maidens can be!" exclaimed Poll; "As if, forsooth, you didn't know, both of ye, as pat as a pancake to Shrove Tuesday, or a coloured egg to Easter, that the young farmer I'm telling you of, is none other than master George Page."

"And what of him?" asked Alice; for Margaret was at that instant busy, untwisting a knot that had somehow got into the yarn she was spinning.

"Ah, you're a daughter of grannam Eve, mistress Alice, like us all, Lord forgive us!" exclaimed Poll Quickly. "Now, I warrant me, you couldn't guess, not you, that master Page's talk was nought but of a certain young maiden, that sits nearer to me, than I am to London town; and if I was to say she's one of the two who are known for the merriest maids in all Windsor, you wouldn't think that, either, would you?"

"And pr'ythee what was his talk of us? What found he new to say of his two old playmates and neighbours?" said Alice.

"Why, he said—he said—that he loved them both dearly;" stammered Poll Quickly; who, when thus called upon to repeat what master Page had actually said, could recollect nothing more definite in his laudation.

The two merry maidens burst into a gay laugh. "Is that all the mystery thou hast to tell? That's nothing new. We know full well that we are favourites of his, as two friends of such long standing needs must be;" said Alice.

"Ay, but his favourite one of the two of ye—which is she, I wonder?" said Poll Quickly slyly, and rallying; for she was not long to be disconcerted.

"Ay,—which?—I wonder, which?" said Alice.

"Troth, mistress Alice, you're a sly bird; but there's a fowler lying in wait for you, or I'm much mistook, that'll lure you into his net some of these fine days, and make you his turtle-dove; he'll springe ye, he'll ring-fence ye, he'll cage ye, I'll warrant; which heaven send, I pray." So saying, with many a nod, and wink, and chuckling laugh, Poll Quickly left the wicket-gate, and pottered away.

About this time, Sir Marmaduke Ducandrake returned to his estate at Windsor, after a lengthened sojourn in London, where he had contrived to fool away larger sums of money than ever.

On his arrival home Sir Marmaduke sent for his bailiff, farmer Page, and told him the occasion he had for various sums; and among others, he mentioned that he had given his note of hand for money borrowed from a certain Robert Shallow, Esq., of Gloucestershire, and desired Page would find a trustworthy messenger to convey the amount of his debt to Gloucestershire. The farmer undertook that his own son should execute the knight's commission; and accordingly George Page was desired to be ready by the following morning, to set out upon his journey.

Now, a journey of some seventy miles, through Berkshire woods, and meadows, and among Gloucestershire uplands and hills, in lovely summer weather, on horseback, should seem no such irksome task; and yet, when it was first proposed by farmer Page to his son, George did not feel much glee in its prospect. But he took his father's directions, and prepared to set forth with his usual frank good humour and unclouded brow.

The cause of his unwillingness might be gathered from the words he muttered to himself, as he saddled his horse at an early hour next day. "Well, I should have carried a lighter heart into Gloucestershire could I have told its secret to Meg before I went; I should be a coxcomb to fancy that hers will be heavy at my going away without a word; but yet, I would I had seen her ere I left Windsor."

The air was scented with many a haycock and bean-blossom, as it wafted over field and meadow; its stillness was marred by no ruder sound than the soaring lark's song, the lowing of herded kine, the hum of insects, the rustle of leaves stirred by its light summer breeze. All nature seemed filled with sweet and hopeful things; while still the burden of George Page's thought was:—"yet I would I had seen her ere I left Windsor." It had not been repeated to himself above twenty-five times,—when, suddenly his ear caught sound of a blithe voice carolling some rustic ballad, and his eye fell

upon the very form which of all others he had been longing to see.

Yes; there was Margaret Gay singing as clear as a blackbird, carrying a basket on her arm, and stepping at a smart pace along the hedge-row footpath, which skirted the bridle-way.

"Why, what in the name of blest fortune brings thee abroad, and so early?" said George Page.

"I am going across the fields to Ashleigh farm; there's a cotter there, who was once a hind at my father's. Mother heard that his poor wife, and two of his children, are sick of the hay-fever, so she sent me over to take them a couple of pullets to make broth of, and some new-laid eggs. And what may take you this way? On horseback, too; it must be some distant errand."

"I go, at my father's bidding, into Gloucestershire;" answered George Page; "but I can't tell thee well all about it, thou walking, I riding. Either I'll dismount, and sit beside thee awhile under the hedge; or thou shalt get up with me, and let Daisy carry thee to Ashleigh farm, round by the road-way, which, with the help of her back, will be as near as the path over the fields."

"I'll not be the means of making George Page loiter on his errands; and so, mayhap, get his father's ill-word;" said Meg.

"Give me thy hand, then; set thy foot firm on my instep; now give a spring, and up thou art!" And thus she was lifted to his saddle-bow.

"Meg, my father sends me on business of Sir Marmaduke's, to one justice Shallow. I shall be gone a bare fortnight, I fancy; but meanwhile I'm glad to have seen Margaret Gay before I set forth, though it be to say farewell."

"'Farewell' for so short an absence is no hard way to say;" said Margaret Gay. "Better have to say 'farewell' for a fortnight's ride, than 'God be wi' you' for a year and a sea-voyage."

"I am glad to hear thee say thou had'st rather part with me for a fortnight than a year, Meg. But let me ask thee a plain question or two."

"Thou'rt like to get but wry answers to thy plain questions, if thou hold'st me so tight, George;" said she; "prisoners, thou know'st, are apt to be crabbed in reply to their jailers."

"I am no jailer; I would be none to thee, Meg; I would be thy husband;" said George Page.

"My husband? cry you mercy, what is that but a jailer?" replied she.

"I'll shew thee what else, if thou'lt make thee mine, dear Meg;" he said. "No grim jailer; but a warm friend, a loving spouse, shalt thou have of me, if thou wilt have me for a husband. Thou should'st never know crueller usage than this." The last word was accompanied by something that rhymed to it; while Meg said;—"If you neglect the bridle thus, master George, I fear me, Daisy will take her own pace, and we shall never reach Ashleigh farm to-day."

"I care not how long we are going thither;" said George Page.

"Is it thus you obey your father's bidding to speed into Gloucestershire?" asked Meg.

"He bade me ride, not speed; and I am resolved I will not on thither, until I carry with me thy promise to be my wife on my return, Meg. "I've set my heart on it."

"If so I can but give thee the promise thou desir'st, George; and to make it better worth the carrying, suppose I let thee know that my heart goes with it?" said Meg.

The storm of kisses with which her frank words were greeted, may be inferred from Meg's exclamation of "George, you'll frighten the very birds off the trees! See how farmer Ashleigh's sober cows are staring at us! But there's Miles Swinkley's cottage. Now set me down in earnest, George. God bless thee; and farewell!"

With one parting hug, the lover let his mistress dismount; and then he set forward at a pace that should make up for the time he had so pleasantly lost.

Not long after George Page had returned home from Gloucestershire, Frank Ford also returned to Windsor. He too travelled on horseback, and as he rode into the town, he stopped at the Star inn, for a glass of small ale after his hot

and dusty ride. Poll Quickly, the barmaid, who had handed it to him, dropped him a deferential curtsey, and bid him welcome back.

"Well, and what is the best news with you, mistress Polly; and what is the newest among the Windsor folk?"

"'Faith, bad's the best of my news, master Ford, good as it is of you to ask that;" she replied. "A barmaid's life is not the life of a lady. Travellers are few of them lords, fewer of 'em angels; and fewer still, have any angels to bestow on the barmaid; a paltry tester is the oftest coin that finds its way to her hand, from travellers' pockets; and seldom have they eyes to see that her coif would be all the better for a shilling's worth of ribbon; but that's neither here nor there."

"I would not so disparage the coif thou wear'st now, as to say that it needs a new ribbon; but here's a shilling that will replace the bright one thou hast, when it fades;" said Ford smiling, as he took the hint so palpably aimed. "And now for the rest of thy news."

"First and foremost, there's Sir Paul Pureton's news; he's dead;" said Poll Quickly; "then master Hugh Evans, the Welsh Latin scholar, is to be reader in his place, which will make him Sir Hugh, of course; then there's little old Will Patterly, the barber; he's joined hands in the dance of death, too; but he was past his work, so there's no great loss to Windsor, and but small gain to the worms, for such a starveling body as he was, will make but a spare meal for 'em. A plumper morsel they'll get in Dick Cleaveholm, the butcher, who, they say, is well-nigh off the hooks, and can't last a week. A many's the carcass he's chopped up, and now he's to be cut off himself! Well, Heaven's above all!"

"What a catalogue of deaths thou hast to tell me, good mistress Polly!" exclaimed Frank Ford; "is there no pleasant news stirring? Nothing but dismal tidings in Windsor?"

"Ay now, I warrant me, it's weddings, and not funerals, you young folks love to hear of;" said Poll; "well, there's something going on that'll lead to weddings, or I'm much mistook." And she nodded her head mysteriously.

"What 'something'? I pr'ythee," said Ford.

"Well then, both the long and the short of it, and the very yea and the no is, that master George Page is in love with one of the merry maids of Windsor—and you know well enough who are the two that bear that nay-name."

"Ay, ay; I know well enough! And which of them is George's choice?" said Frank Ford, hurriedly.

"Well, as I told you, I have an eye to see, and an ear to hear; and though he beat about the bush, and wouldn't have had me see which of 'em he had the best mind to, yet as clear as eggs is eggs—speciously new-laid ones,—I could make out that he asked the most direct questions about mistress Alice May."

"I thought as much;" muttered Frank Ford between his ground teeth. "It's but too clear; I ever dreaded this. Who could see her, and not love her? And he has seen her and known her from childhood;" thought Frank Ford.

"And now, I'll warrant, we shall have you making up to the other merry maiden; and so, we shall have a double wedding; Lord forgive us!" said Poll Quickly. "And a comely bride she'll make, will mistress Margaret; and a merry wooing and a speedy wedding may you have of it with her, I say, and I pray too."

"It is kindly meant, and kindly wished; I thank thee for thy wish, mistress Polly;" said Frank Ford, as he took his leave of the Star hostelry, and its communicative barmaid.

That evening there was to be a merry-making at farmer Page's, to celebrate the return of his son from Gloucestershire. All the young people of the neighbourhood were to be there; and when it was found that Frank had also come home from college that very day, an invitation was despatched, begging him to join the party. He was in no mood for mirth; he thought of pleading fatigue from his ride, a headache,—anything—to excuse him from going among his friends, two of whom he dreaded to meet. Then he thought the pain of seeing them together, and of witnessing the tokens of their attachment, would be even less agony than the tormenting tricks which his fancy now played him.

With his heart full of such thoughts, it may well be conceived that Frank Ford's manner of greeting his old friends,

when he went among them that evening, was not particularly gracious.

On his arrival at farmer Page's, he found all the guests assembled; the dancing had already commenced with great vigour, in the largest barn; and the first thing Frank Ford's eyes encountered there, was the lithe figure of Alice May, led by George Page, as the young couple performed together with great spirit the evolutions of a country-dance.

He thought he had never seen her look so beautiful, so happy. The fact is, her partner was just whispering in her ear the news that Frank Ford had arrived in Windsor that morning, and that he might be expected among them every moment.

"You take so strong an interest in the dancing, though but a looker-on as yet, Master Ford," said a cheerful voice near him, "that you have not had time to greet your old friend and neighbour. Come, suppose you lead me to the lower end of the floor, and let us join the dancers together; as neither you nor I have met with a partner, let us take pity on each other, what say you?"

Thus challenged by Margaret Gay, Frank Ford could not refuse, and they accordingly took their places below the rest of the couples, to dance their way gradually up to the top of the set.

But it was not long before Margaret perceived the abstraction of her partner, and shrewdly guessed its cause.

"So, so; my gentleman is jealous, is he? And of poor George, too! He little knows"—and her thought ended with a smile.

Presently, she perceived that, in the course of the dance, Frank had had occasion to take Alice's hand; that he had sought to retain it; but that the figure requiring a quick change of hands, Alice had been compelled to withdraw it hastily from his, that she might return it to her partner; and after this, Margaret saw Frank's face cloud over more moodily than before.

"You would have me believe in the lasting existence of kind feeling, Margaret;" he said, biting his lip, "and here I find a friend whom I have known from childhood, snatching away her

hand, as if I had been an adder among violets she stooped to gather."

"In the ardour of dancing, friendship is forgotten;" she answered, smiling; "to the claims of a figure, even those of an old friend must give way."

Just then, the dance concluded; and George Page came up, with his usual hearty manner, to shake hands with Frank Ford, and bid him welcome back to Windsor.

There was no resisting his cordial frankness, and for a few moments, Ford forgot all, in the pleasure of finding his hand once more within the grasp of his old friend and companion.

But when George Page turned towards Alice, who was leaning upon his arm, and put her hand within Ford's, saying:—"Here is another Windsor favourite of yours; you must dance with Alice May the next measure;" Frank saw in this but the action of an engaged lover, who permitted his mistress to dance one dance with the new-comer; and, in consequence, all his former moody coldness returned upon him.

This was terribly apparent to Alice, during the silent progress through the dance which they made together. At length, the dance came to an end; and, leading her to a seat, which happened to be near Margaret Gay, he bowed coldly, and withdrew.

"Why sweetheart, why Alice!" whispered her friend, "look not so shame-faced and downcast, as though thou wert to blame, not he. Out upon it! Here's a trembling white lip, and a glistening eye; and all for what, forsooth? Because a young moon-stricken simpleton chooses to come home and fancy a thousand things, instead of seeing the plain one, straight before his nose."

George Page now came towards them to say that a game of barley-break had been proposed; and that the sport was about to commence in the home-paddock.

Margaret Gay hastily found means to inform Page of Frank's jealous freak, of her plan to convince him of his error by allowing him to continue in it for a few hours, and then shewing him its absurdity by confessing their own mutual engagement.

George Page laughed at her eagerness, but suffered himself

to be persuaded to act the part of a favoured lover towards Alice for a short space, on condition that the period of Frank Ford's torment should not be unreasonably protracted.

"Never fear, never fear; do you and Alice play your parts truly, and I'll engage for a happy ending. Here, take her hand, and lead her away to the home-paddock, while I go and seek my crotchety student."

Margaret Gay hurried away, and found Frank Ford already upon the ground, standing a little apart from the gay party who were forming themselves into groups and couples, preparatory to a bout at their favourite game of Barley-break.

Margaret stood near to Frank Ford's side, and it was scarce difficult to read in his troubled brow, the thoughts that occupied his heart. "They have made up all the couples, beside ourselves, master Ford;" said Margaret; "let us take our stand together, or we shall not find a place, save in the centre division, and you know what that's called!"

"Ay, it is called 'hell;'" replied he; then added in a mutter; "I am there already, methinks, watching them."

"Are you one of the sober-minded youths who think Barley-break a naughty sinful game, and an ill mode of passing time, master Ford;" asked Margaret Gay, with a sly smile, and a glance at his gloomy look; "I'm told there are such; mayhap, your books have taught you to turn Puritan, or Brownist."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Ford, as he led the laughing girl to join the players; as much to put a stop to her banter, as that he had any mind to take part in what was going forward.

And now the sport began. As may be imagined, infinite were the scufflings, the hustlings, the shriekings, the pushings, the pullings, the dodgings, the dartings, the screamings, the evadings, and the seekings to be caught, on the part of the several runners engaged in the different sets of players; for, as there were but three couples to each game of Barley-break, so there had to be several sets or games made up in different parts of the field.

The chances of the game now threw Frank Ford and Alice May within the centre compartment together. Thus coupled, thus linked with her, hand-in-hand, all his stern resolutions, his

anger against her, were put to flight; it was impossible to harbour resentment against one whose hand trembled within his own, and whose soft blue eyes seemed seeking pardon of his; and soon, his only thought was how to prolong the time of their remaining together within this boundary, which now he found to be anything but 'hell' to him. As this state of feeling somehow communicated itself to Alice, it naturally befel that they relaxed in their attempts to capture the rest of the couples, and it as naturally ensued that the game languished and was broken up; the players dispersed, in groups, to the orchard, where, beneath the cherry-trees, a supper was spread, while still so early that it might be eaten by the glow of the western sun.

Margaret Gay's quick eye glanced round the table, and she whispered George Page who sat beside her:—"I see neither Alice May, nor Frank Ford. My life on't, that little traitress has dropped the mask, thrown up her part, and left the play unplayed out."

"I shouldn't wonder;" said George Page with his quiet smile. "I saw Frank Ford lead her apart, when the sport broke up; they took the path towards the meadows; and if Frank Ford's the man I take him for, and Alice May the gentle girl I know her to be, why then he has not rested, nor she stinted, till he won her to tell him the secret of your play, as you call it; which, I take it, has been a tragedy to him."

"Serve him right! She's a silly wench if she let him off so easy," said Margaret; "after so wild and groundless a jealousy as his. He'll plague her with some of these yellow whims, by-and-by, if she take not good heed; mark my word. But see! here come Frank and Alice. Alack, for my play! It is played out indeed! Who can fail to read 'impending matrimony' writ in both those tell-tale faces?"

George Page hastened towards them, to perform his duty of host in securing Frank and his blushing companion a seat at the supper-table; and as he did so, he contrived to convey by his expressive look and his hearty shake of the hand, his congratulation on the right understanding to which all of them had happily come.

On the following day, Frank Ford asked Alice of her father, in form; and while he stepped into farmer May's house to do this, he left his mistress in company with George Page and Margaret Gay, having all four been walking together. Of course it was by the merest chance that the young people had met; but as they had fallen in with each other, it was agreed between them that they would saunter on for an hour or two through the pleasant glades of Windsor park, so soon as Frank should rejoin them.

During his absence, Alice May had walked on a few paces, in rustic goodnatured fashion, leaving the lovers to follow by themselves; but George Page overtook her, and passing her arm within his own, while on his other arm he had Margaret Gay, he declared that love should not make him so unsociable as to let Alice May walk on by herself; and that he insisted on escorting them both, until her rightful companion returned.

Now it happened, that as the young farmer was proceeding thus, with a merry maiden under each arm, all three gaily laughing and chatting, reckoning over the many pleasant neighbourly hours they had all spent together, and looking forward happily to the many more they still hoped to spend thus, who should come by that way, but mistress Poll Quickly, with a large basket on her arm, coming over the fields from Frogmore, where she had been to fetch some cream and butter that was wanted.

She spied Page from a distance; and also saw clearly enough who were his companions, and how familiarly they were all linked arm-in-arm; and she said to herself:—"Lord, Lord, if that wicked young fellow be not in sober verity, no less in love than he said he was, with the merry maids, two at a time! To think of him; and to think of them, letting him bring 'em into such a canaries, is what I should never have thought of two such seeming innocents."

As she approached the group, however, some of her virtuous horror oozed out; giving place to that easy tolerance, which her desire to be on popular terms with everybody, made second nature to her.

"A goodly company, and a fitting, for such a fine warm morning as this;" she said, as she came up with the party, dropping a curtsey, and smirking at them. "It's well to be a heathen Turk, and a Christian farmer all in one, when a handsome young Englishman would fain look well in more than one fair pair of eyes; and as long as virtuous maids are willing to be friendly and peaceable, and rather agree in their liking, than fall out and pull caps because one man happens to please 'em both, why, such amical doings is a blessing, I say; and long may you all go on kindly together, I pray."

"I'm afraid I shan't be able to persuade both my sultanas to marry me, Turk as I may be;" said Page, laughing; "but I hope I may say, I think they both like me well; and I swear that shall content me."

"That we do, mistress Polly; we both love George Page dearly and heartily, and he loves us; dost thou not, master Page?" said they.

"Right truly, on the faith of an honest man and a farmer—an Englishman, and no Turk!" he replied.

"Well, rest ye merry, good gentlefolks;" said Poll Quickly, bobbing a parting curtsey, and feeling rather baffled by their unconstrained manner and laughing words. "But if black swans are not white angels to those two merry maids, (Heaven forgive me for saying so!)" she continued to herself, as she pursued her way, "why then I'm no judge of birds and angels, or maids either—shy birds and sly birds as mistress Alice May and mistress Margaret Gay both are."

Presently she met Frank Ford; who having prospered in his suit, and obtained farmer May's joyful consent to wed his daughter, was coming along with an alert step, and a beamingly happy face.

"Poor young man!" she thought, as he approached, and she observed his well-pleased air, "he would'nt look so cheerly, an' he knew what games his sweetheart's going on, when his back is turned. I've a month's mind to help him to an inkling. "Give ye good-morrow, master Ford;" she said aloud, as she came up to him; "you'll be for taking a stroll through the park, this fine morning, I warrant me; and if you take the glade leaving

the castle to your left, I shouldn't wonder but you'd stumble on a sight that'll make your eyes open as wide as from now till Martlemas. Troth, master Ford, it's a sight for a good man to see; a young girl hanging on one man's arm, when if she's an honest girl she should be in another man's arms. And what should you say, master Ford, if I was to tell ye, that such a young girl's name is Gay; and that the young man's name with the arm she is leaning on, is no other than Page; and that he's not even content with that, but he must be having two of 'em at once, like a dog in the manger as he is—a merry maid tucked under each arm; Lord forgive us! What say you to that?"

"I think it's very hard he should get both the merry maids of Windsor to his share;" said Ford, laughing. "I'll after him, and see if he won't give me up one of them."

"Alas, master Ford! Would you take up with his leavings?" asked Poll.

"I mean not that;" answered Ford. "I shall take one of the merry maids from him, and leave him the other; and then, thou know'st, he will have my leavings."

With a laughing nod of farewell to her, he ran on to overtake his friends.

It was not long, ere the two pair of lovers agreed upon the day which was to make them joyful husbands and wives. And when the day arrived,—the friends and relations on all sides assembling and forming a goodly procession; the two brides attired alike, with knots of memorial rosemary fastened to their sleeves, as was the wont; and a rich bride-cup of silver-gilt, in which was a branch of rosemary gilded brightly, and hung about with ribbons, borne before them;—it was allowed on all hands that two more comely bridegrooms, than young master Ford and young master Page, two fairer brides than young mistress May and young mistress Gay, had not been wedded in the old church for many a day.

Thus, the two merry maids became the merry wives of Windsor; for with their new dignity came no shadow to cloud their spirits. Years flew by, and scarce brought any change in their good looks—none at all, in their good-humour and merry-hearted cheer.

Somewhat more crumby, plump, and buxom, perhaps, they had become in their fair proportions; the white shoulders were more ample; the arms rounder; the cheeks had a fuller outline; while neither of their waists were quite so remarkable for slenderness as they had been; yet still, when there was a dance in the old barn, or a game on the green-sward, Meg and Alice were still as alert as ever, and their husbands were to the full as well-pleased to see them there as formerly, and never found that their figures had become more portly, or their steps less active.

Frank Ford had been, in the course of time, left so well off by his father, that he was able to maintain his wife as a gentlewoman, without any necessity for his following his father's profession of lawyer; while George Page, when his father died, determined from choice, to follow his vocation, as farmer and land-steward to Sir Marmaduke Ducandrake. Both the friends lived in ease and comfort, while their wives had money and time entirely at command, to spend as they pleased.

Mistress Page had, a year after marriage, brought her husband a little girl; who became the pet and darling of the whole family.

But she was a good little soul, a sweet simple child; one of those pleasant natures, that it is well-nigh impossible to render less pleasant, even by the most inveterate spoiling that a tribe of doting relations can inflict. Nothing could prove this better than the birth of her little brother William. After eight or nine years of undisputed sovereignty, another child appeared to share her rule over the hearts of the fond parents and relatives.

But far from seeming to regard this little one as an intruder, no one welcomed the baby boy with greater delight than Anne,—now no longer baby Anne, but sister Anne. She nursed him, she hugged him, she lugged him about, and would fain have had him never out of her arms, in spite of the hint which mistress Quickly once gave her mother, to the effect that "If little mistress Anne was allowed to bear about young master in that sort, from pillar to post, alas, no ram's horn, nor no curly-tailed pig which would be crookeder than that child's shoulder, good heart!"

When it became high time that William should be placed

under more erudite tuition than a sister,—however devoted,—could supply, Anne still took charge of him as far as possible. He was sent to school with Sir Hugh Evans,—now become village schoolmaster in place of Peter Scriven deceased; and every morning might Anne Page be seen, leading her little brother by the hand, carrying his satchel for him, and beguiling the way, as he leaped and jumped at her side.

Both the children liked parson Hugh; all the children in Windsor liked him; he was good-humoured, fond of his pupils, and more peppery in manner than really strict or severe. He loved better to give them a holiday at some good-natured friend's asking, than to scourge or even scold them for non-attendance, or non-attention at their lessons.

He was proud of his acquaintance with Robert Shallow, Esq. justice of the peace in the county of Gloucestershire. Could not forbear boasting to the boys of his having been to the same school with that worshipful personage; told them his friend the justice had promised to pay him a visit at his poor school-house at Windsor some day or other; and that if ever such an auspicious event should occur, he would grant them a holiday on the strength of it. At which, all the boys would set up a roaring huzza, and cry, "Long live parson Hugh and his noble friend justice Shallow!"

The friendly relations between this last-named worshipful gentleman, and master George Page, had also been kept up during the years that had elapsed since his first visit to the squire's. Master Robert Shallow did not forget that it was Page who had brought him the sum of money, which, after the first enthusiasm of obliging a court knight with its loan, he had had misgivings he might never see again.

Presents of game, a fine buck in season, or a goodly cheese of Gloucester, would often travel up by wain from the knight's seat for master Page's acceptance; while courtesies of acknowledgment in the shape of some new recipe or hint in farriery, some dog of superior breed, a good pointer, or handsome fallow greyhound, would be sent in return from Windsor to the squire, or to young master Slender.

On the squire's side, there were the reasons above-stated, for

the friendly feeling he preserved towards master Page; and on the other, the good yeoman sometimes found himself reflecting that the justice's cousin, master Slender, would come into a round sum of money at his mother's death; and then he would speculate upon the possibility of securing such a match for his daughter, by bringing about a marriage between her and master Abraham Slender.

Meanwhile matters were taking place in Gloucestershire, which were likely to bring about his wish.

Justice Shallow had been made somewhat uneasy by symptoms of a preference springing up between his cousin, Abraham Slender, and a certain Alice Shortcake, a baker's daughter, who lived in the nearest village to Shallow Park. The old gentleman would never have had the perspicacity to make this discovery for himself, but the lynx eyes of a mother had acquainted mistress Slender with some particulars which she thought betokened the fact, and she forthwith consulted her cousin Shallow upon what had best be done to save her son, and the darling of them both, from the ignominy of such a match.

The worthy justice promised his potent aid; but just at that time, it happened, that his attention was diverted from the subject of his young cousin's possible enthralment, by the unexpected advent of one of his old town acquaintance, Sir John Falstaff, who, with three of his retainers, came down to Gloucestershire on a long-promised visit.

This visit proved anything but agreeable to the host. Matters were carried with so reckless a hand by the knight and his riotous followers—they committed so many extravagances—and behaved with so little regard to decency, that instead of the amicable terms on which the two gentlemen had hitherto maintained their intimacy, they parted this time, with threats of seeking redress on the one side, contemptuous defiance on the other.

Master Robert Shallow brooded on these wrongs, and meditated means of obtaining the vengeance he sought. He thought he would go up to Windsor, where the court at present was, and state his wrongs in the proper quarter; he bethought him that thus he might enjoy the pleasure he had often promised

himself of seeing master Page again, and at the same time fulfil an engagement of long-standing with Sir Hugh Evans, who looked forward with pride to having him under his roof. He had just made up his mind (the word slips in unadvisedly, speaking of the worthy gentleman) on the many eligible features of the plan, when one more circumstance was added, which made him decide upon the Windsor expedition as the wisest possible device, to obtain his own wishes, and to remove his cousin at once from a dangerous vicinity.

It happened that justice Shallow, while making the above reflections, was pacing up and down a sunny open space in his deer-park near to the high road, when he heard voices; one of which was a woman's, and the other he recognized as his cousin Slender's.

"Nay, but master Slender," he heard the damsel's voice say, "I'm sure your worship won't refuse me so very a trifle as a puppy. I'm sure I couldn't refuse you a dog, or anything else that you asked of me, master Slender."

"But you have no dog—and I ask no dog of you, mistress Alice;" said Slender.

"But is there nothing else you would care to have of me, master Slender? I would fain show you I can refuse you nothing, if I may coax you to part with the dog, for I've taken a fancy to him."

"He's a gift of master Page's, and I daren't give him away, lest my cousin Shallow should chide;" said Slender; "and as for aught else I could wish of you, beside a dog—there might be something I could fancy, but that I overheard Yead Miller once say, if any man ever took such a thing of you, he'd take him a blow of his cudgel should last him his life."

"And what was it no man was to get of me without Yead Miller's good leave, I trow?"

"Marry, no less than—a—a—kiss;" faltered he.

A little shrill scream followed, which seemed to scare master Slender, and which he hastened to appease, by exclaiming:—"Nay, it was his word, not mine, and I'll sooner be hanged than make it my deed, if you'll only cease screaming, and tell me you're not angered!"

"Pshaw!" muttered the voice of the damsel, as she seemed to fling from him, and quit the spot.

Presently, the long legs of master Slender appeared above the top rail of the stile which divided the park from the road; and in another moment, himself came into the open space where his cousin Shallow was, who said, as he approached:—"What woman was that you parted with just now, coz?"

"Woman? I know of no woman;" said master Slender, with more than his ordinary sheepishness of aspect.

"Come, come, that shall not serve, cousin. Come cousin, come cousin, confess, confess."

"I know not what to confess;" said master Slender.

"Confess that you care more for that wench, than you'd have me know of, coz. But it would not sort well with the honour of an old family like ours, coz,—that may quarter, and write himself esquire, coz,—for master Abraham Slender to wed with Alice Shortcake, the baker's daughter."

"You know her then, uncle?" faltered master Slender.

"Marry, that I do; and I will pardon all, if thou wilt pleasure me, coz, by going with me to Windsor; where Sir Hugh Evans, a worthy friend of mine, shall show thee, as a good churchman should, the sin and wickedness of marrying beneath your degree, and the weakness of trifling with a girl's hopes. It is very wanton dealing, both."

"But, ere I go with you to Windsor, uncle, I would fain get back a book of mine, that I lent to Alice Shortcake. It's a choice garland of riddles that I took with me to make merry with, at the All-hallowmas feast; she wouldn't be gainsaid but that I should let her have it for a while. We so laughed over it together, that it passed."

"Well, coz, thy man Simple shall go over, and ask her for it in thy name;" said Justice Shallow. "Peter Simple shall fetch it thee. Never fear, never fear. And by'rlady, 'tis well thought on, and 'tis well thought on, indeed; thy man Simple shall attend us to Windsor. We shall need a trusty varlet; and he is one, he is one."

And thus the journey to Windsor was settled.

There, meantime, some changes had taken place. Sir Marmaduke Ducandrake died; the estate fell to his nephew, a

young man about town, with a slender purse, and expensive tastes. He came down to take possession, bringing in his train, a number of idle young companions, whose gay manners and congenial pursuits had won his liking. The young gentleman left the management of his affairs still with master Page; merely renewing his engagement as bailiff to the estate.

Among the young gentlemen who had accompanied the new sir Marmaduke down to Windsor, was one master Fenton. He was gay, but not heartless, like the rest. He was of gentle birth; had somewhat wasted his patrimony in town pleasures, thinking some day to repair his fortunes by a wealthy marriage; but possessed a nature capable of being touched by excellence. He had met Anne Page more than once by chance, coming with her little brother from school; had been struck with her simple beauty; had formed acquaintance with her, and begun to flatter himself that she found nearly as much pleasure from it as himself; while gradually it struck young William, that his sister left him oftener and oftener to find his way to and from school by himself, unless his mother would be his companion, which she frequently was.

On one of these occasions, when Anne Page had forgotten that it was the hour for fetching her brother, because she happened to be walking with master Fenton in the meadows, whom she had by the merest accident met there, it befel that mistress Quickly came upon them, just as the young people parted.

"A fair day to fair mistress Anne, is a fair wish, and it is mine, in good sooth;" said she; "I need not wish her fair company, for that she has just parted with, I see;" added she, with a sly glance in the direction of master Fenton's retreating figure. "But I hear there's to be grand doings on your birthday, next week, mistress Anne. A goodly feast it'll be, I warrant me. And you'll be sixteen years of age, I give Heaven praise."

"And thou must come to the feast, mistress Quickly;" said Anne Page. "Thou wast at my christening, thou know'st, and, if all be true, at my mother's, before me."

"Troth, mistress Anne, that I was; and a specious christening, both of 'em, I warrant ye. But I must be going. Out upon it!

My master will be home before me; and then there'll be no end to frowns, and cracked English, and hub-bub, and find-fault, and to-do!" said mistress Quickly, with so sudden a recollection of her domesticities, as might have led to the suspicion, that having gained her object—an invitation to the birthday feast,—she had leisure to remember her duty.

The feast was no less magnificent, than had been mistress Quickly's anticipations touching its probable arrangements.

Among the guests, were young Sir Marmaduke, and the troop of friends he had staying with him, including master Fenton; there were also some late arrivals in the town, hangers-on of the court, gentlemen with whom Page had from time to time made a slight acquaintance. Of these latter, happened to be Sir John Falstaff. Sir Hugh Evans was there, who mentioned to master Page a letter, which he had received from their friend justice Shallow, announcing his intended visit to Windsor.

Master Page told Sir Hugh he was glad of this, as Falstaff being at present there, it might lead to a reconciliation between the justice and the knight, which he should do his utmost to bring about.

Sir Hugh promised "to use his pest discretions and benignities" to help on so amicable a project; but as for Sir John, when he heard who was expected, he only said:—

"What, justice Shallow? Poor devil! He'll hardly care to meet me, or look me in the face; he owes me money—some thousand pound strong; or so. But he needn't fear me; I'll not press the debt. He shall have time. I'm a moderate man—save in the girth; exacting only in the span of my sword-belt. My body craves amplitude of doublet; but for mine own desires, they are limited—to excess."

Master Robert Shallow and his cousin Slender arrive in Windsor. They are welcomed by their friends.

Master Page's scheme for a son-in-law assumes form and substance.

Mistress Page has still her own project for Anne's future husband; but meanwhile her attention is distracted from the subject by a strange proposal on her own score, which forces from her the exclamation:—

"*What! have I 'scaped love-letters in the holiday time of my beauty, and am I now a subject for them? Let me see.*"

She has no sooner re-read the paper, than to her comes mistress Ford, saying:—

"*Mistress Page! trust me, I was going to your house!*"

MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR, Act. ii. Sc. 1.



TALE VI.

ISABELLA; THE VOTARESS.

ALL the Vienna world was abroad, and gay, and well-dressed, and bent on pleasure; for it was the first of May,—when every Viennese puts on new clothes, and sallies forth, and makes holiday; and the city becomes a scene of colour and animation.

Through the public thoroughfares the crowd streamed on; wending to see the foot-racing on the Prater.

Among the pedestrians, was one couple, who, as they lounged along, were not sparing of their remarks upon the rest, and who uttered them in a loud jeering tone, regardless of giving offence.

The man,—a short, thick-set fellow, with a ferocious moustache, and a cruel eye; a skin that bespoke double daily drink to daily bread,—held on his arm a young girl, who was young only in years, for her face had in it that which betokened an age of horrible experiences.

In the midst of their boisterous mirth, it suddenly received a check, by one of the horses starting from the line of cavalcade, and plunging and rearing violently in their immediate vicinity; his hoof struck the girl, before she could get out of his way. She recoiled with a scream of pain; while her companion sprang forward, with an oath, to seize the horse's rein, and to revenge himself on the rider. But the animal dashed past him, and bore his master away, leaving the other pouring forth a volley of curses and vows for vengeance.

"Don't heed it—I'm not much hurt;" said the girl with difficulty; for she was struggling to hide the pain she was in.

"Not much hurt!" with another oath; "you might have been killed!"

"Take me out of the crowd for a minute or two, and I shall be right enough soon."

The man led her up a quiet by-street.

"Here, sit you down here, Nanni, my girl;" said he, as he turned through the gates of a little old church-yard; "sit upon one of these mounds, and get your breath."

"Not here;" said the girl shuddering, and looking round. "I can't sit here. You said just now, I might have been killed; so I might—and have been brought and laid here." She looked round upon the graves; she looked up at the old church-tower; up into that sky beyond, and a dark troubled expression settled on her brow.

"Why what a plague's come to the wench!" exclaimed the man, as he watched her disturbed look and quivering lip, "you're no coward, are you, Nan, to shiver and shake after the danger's over?"

"O I don't know—nothing;—nothing's come to me; I'm better now;" said the girl hurriedly. "But what's that—over there—sitting among the graves—all in white? see!"

"I suppose you think it's a ghost! What the devil's come over you?" And Ugo Branz invoked condemnation on his eyes and limbs, as well as body and soul.

"A ghost? No; more like an angel!" said she. "It's a child. See how it sits, like a marble image; with its folded hands and drooping head."

"I'll tell you what, my girl," said the man, "if you're going to stay here all day in this mouldy old church-yard, fancying ghosts, and spirits, and angels, and all that sort of rubbish, you may stay here by yourself; for I shan't, I promise you."

He flung out of the churchyard, and the girl crept away, giving a free course to the tears of suffering she had till then suppressed; she occasionally put her hand to her bruised side as if it gave her great pain, and wandered away from the crowded Prater to a quiet unfrequented path down by the river.

She threw herself down on the raised path by the way side, where she sat rocking herself to and fro.

Presently a little footstep approached. A child, of but a few years old, came in sight, walking along the road by itself, looking about, yet keeping steadily on without stopping.

Nanni watched the child involuntarily; and as it came near to the spot where she sat, she could not help saying :—

"Why, you're a bit of a thing to be wandering here by yourself. Where are you going to?"

"To Heaven," said the little one.

"Bless the child!" was the startled rejoinder.

"I'm trying to find my way there. There must be some way to get there; and I want to go up—up there—to her!" And the child pointed up into the blue sky with its baby finger.

"Where do you come from?"

"From the church-yard."

Nanni eyed the child, as if she would have scarce been surprised to see a pair of wings spread themselves, and bear it soaring away from her sight; but in another moment she recognized it for the same she had beheld sitting upon one of the graves, when she was led into the churchyard by Ugo Branz.

"Do you know the way to Heaven?" resumed the child.

"I might have known it, perhaps, one time"—replied the girl, hurriedly; "I've forgotten it, I suppose."

"I wish I'd met you before you forgot it," said the child earnestly.

Suddenly she held out her hand to Nanni, and said :—"Come with me; we'll try and find the way together, shall we?"

The girl burst into a passion of crying. "Too late, too late!" She exclaimed wildly; and beat her hands together, and clenched them among her hair.

The child, disconcerted, drew back; and went upon her way, regretting the poor woman would not come and help in the search.

And for hours still that unhappy woman sat there, her whole attitude expressive of the despondency that possessed her. At length she rose, and hurried along the river side.

"Rejected of man—let me seek mercy of God!" she murmured, turning to the river.

But in turning, her eye caught sight of something white that

lay among the rank grass, at a little distance. It was the child whom she had twice encountered that morning, lying upon the ground, in a fast sleep.

It seemed tired and foot-sore; for its shoes were dusty and worn—so worn, that one little foot peered through the broken sole, and was slightly stained with blood. Helpless as it lay there, it seemed to embody so powerfully the spirit of purity, that Nanni felt as if she could have knelt and worshipped the presence she involuntarily recognized.

Reverently she stooped, and drew off the little shoes; then tearing her handkerchief into strips, she bandaged the wounded feet, after having bathed them in some water fetched in the hollow of her hand from the river.

The child sat up and smiled, while it sleepily watched the operation.

"Thank you! How kind you are! How nicely you have bound up my feet! They were very sore with walking so far. I was very tired, I believe, and fell asleep;" said the child.

"How far do you live from here?" asked Nanni.

"Oh, a great far away off from here. Oh, in Vienna—I should know the house if I saw it—but I don't know the street;" said the child. "I live with Frau Leerheim."

"I'll try and find it for you, if you like; I think I know where she lives," said Nanni.

"I like;" answered the child, taking Nanni's hand so composedly, and walking on with so decided a step, that the girl, although the grown-up person, submitted to the guidance of the little creature, as to that of a superior intelligence.

They had reached the suburbs of the city, and were making their way through the low miserable houses that straggled on either side of the way, leading into Vienna; when Nanni perceived that the little Isabella limped as she walked.

"I wish you would let me carry you," said Nanni.

"No, oh no;" said Isabella. "I would rather not be carried; but I should like to sit down and rest; and then I could walk on again, very well."

Nanni looked about her with a disturbed look; and then seemed to debate some point with herself. "I ought not to

take her there—nor I would not—but she must have rest and food; yes, yes, she must."

So concluding, she turned down among some houses, at one of which she stopped, and taking a key out of her pocket, unlocked the door, and led the way in.

They entered at once into a kind of parlour, of mean appearance, with sanded floor, checked window-curtains, and tables and chairs of commonest wood.

Two of the latter Nanni speedily made into a kind of couch, upon which she spread her shawl, and a folded quilt; then she placed the child carefully on these temporary cushions, to rest at full length. Then she brought some bread, which she cut into slips, and an egg, which she beat up with a little wine and sugar; and then she set the whole on a small table, which she brought close beside Isabella's couch, and begged her to eat.

"And you are going to have some with me?" said the child. "How nice this is! And what a comfortable sofa you've made me! Dear kind Nanni, come and sit here by me—no, not on this side—come round to the other."

The girl, in obedience to her signal, took her seat on the right hand; when Isabella, raising herself upon her knees on the couch, threw her arms round Nanni's neck, and hugged her affectionately, and said:—"Thank you, thank you, dear Nanni, for all your kindness to me!"

As the childish arms twined around, and the little body strained against her, and the fresh rosy lips were pressed to her cheek in hearty true caresses, the tears gushed from the girl's eyes.

"Do I hurt you, dear Nanni? I thought it was the other side that was bruised, or I would not have pressed so hard."

"It is not that—you don't hurt me—you do me good—you make me happier than I ever expected to be again—dear, blessed, little creature—dear little angel"—she repeated, as she ventured timidly to return the embraces that were being lavished on her.

"Do I do you good? I am glad of that—you have been very good to me; you have done me good;" said the child.

"Good? Have I been permitted to do good?" was the

thought that thrilled through the heart of the castaway; while the nearest approach to a gracious feeling which had swelled that heart for many a day, now caused it to throb with grateful emotion towards Him who had vouchsafed the permission.

"But I must not keep you here;" said Nanni, rousing herself from this trance; "your friends will be uneasy; the night is coming on; Frau von Leerheim will be alarmed at your being so long away, and will wonder what is become of you."

They entered the street where Nanni guessed that the widow Leerheim lived. The child pointed out the house, and was running towards the door, when the girl said rapidly:—"Bid me good-bye now, dear; I can't go in—say good-night now."

She caught the child's hands in hers, and covered them with kisses, while Isabella said in the simple nightly words she had been taught by her dead mother:—"Goodnight! God bless you!" And then Nanni turned suddenly, and hurried from the spot.

But that night, when the darkness had yielded to the rising moon, and her beams fell upon a certain small casement in a low-roofed house, there was one sat at the casement, who breathed an unwonted prayer and thanksgiving—for that she had been spared the crowning sin of self-destruction—for that an act of grace had been permitted and accepted at her unworthy hands—and for that a blessing from the lips of spotless purity had been granted to rest upon her outcast head.

Frau Leerheim was what is generally called "a well-meaning woman." She was so well-meaning, that she contented herself with meaning to do well, instead of doing well; and her friends, when they could find nothing of any consequence to praise in her well-doing, gave her all the more credit for well-meaning, finding that that was the great end of her life, at which she constantly stopt short.

Being so particularly well-meaning, she was of course the most fit person in the world to have the charge of children; and accordingly when the father of Claudio and Isabella was left a widower, and was compelled to quit Vienna, he was persuaded by his friends, that he could not possibly find a more

proper person to take care of his motherless children during his probably long absence than Frau Leerheim.

Claudio, having Madame Leerheim's house as a home whenever his vacations at college made him need one; and Isabella, the little girl, remaining at the widow lady's constantly, but subject to little controul there.

The young Isabella went and came pretty much as she liked: roaming about the house, which was spacious, at her own will, and out of doors, even as far as the churchyard where her mother's grave was; for she generally came back about meal-time —and so that Frau Leerheim saw her in her usual place at table, she was quite satisfied as to the general whereabout of the child.

But on the day when Isabella's fancy to seek her mother in Heaven led her to stray so far, and when the dinner hour passed, and still she did not return, Frau Leerheim said:—"I wonder where that child can be! I wonder she don't come home! I wonder they take her out for so long a walk! Fritz, ask Bertha which of the maids it was who took the child out for so long a walk—it was very thoughtless whoever it was—but servants are so thoughtless."

When she heard that Isabella had gone out by herself—she exclaimed:—"O, but really now, they should not allow that child to go out by herself—she might get into mischief. Tell them so below, Fritz. And Fritz! Be sure and let me know the instant the child does return—for I don't know what I should do if any harm were to come to it. What would her poor father say!"

And when, late in the evening, Fritz informed her that the little girl had come home, very tired from having lost her way, Madame said with the slightest possible curl of the mouth (it might be a smile, it might be a yawn):—

"Poor little thing! I'm so glad she's come safe home! But if she's tired, poor thing, don't let her come to me this evening; tell Bertha to have her undressed, and put to bed at once; and give her some fruit and bread, or something, before she's put to bed. I hope they'll see that she's made comfortable, poor thing!"

"They" was a favourite word with Frau Leerheim. It was

so convenient a compromise with her conscience. It acted at once as offender and reformer. It might bear blame when she had occasion to say :—"But really they should not, &c., &c., &c.," or prove a source of expected rectifying and amendment when she said :—"But why don't they, &c., &c., &c." No wonder that "they" was a word which found favour with this well-meaning lady.

The next day, Frau Leerheim met her young charge at breakfast.

"And so you lost your way yesterday, did you, Isabella? Poor child! But how came they to let you go out so far by yourself? That was a sad mistake!"

"I wanted to find my way to Heaven, and I'm afraid it's a great way off!" said Isabella.

"La child!" exclaimed the widow-lady.

"Is it?" said the child.

"Is it what?" said Frau Leerheim, in a somewhat more peevish tone than her usual vapid amiability allowed her to use.

"Is it a great way off?" said Isabella.

"What a strange child you are—what questions you do ask;" said the Frau, looking about her perplexedly, as if in search of somebody, who she thought really should make this child less strange, and tell her not to ask such absurd questions.

"It must be;" said the child; "for nobody seems to know whereabouts it is. Still, I don't think it can be so far, that I shall never find it if I try," said Isabella, thoughtfully; "for my own mamma told me I should come to her there one day."

"I can't conceive why people put such notions into children's heads;" muttered Frau Leerheim. "They really shouldn't; it's positively quite wrong—absolutely wicked—to fill their poor little heads with such fancies, making them tiresome and troublesome."

"What do you think about it, ma'am?" asked Isabella, after a pause.

"About what, child?" said the Frau.

"About Heaven—about where it is;" said Isabella.

"I don't think at all about it;" said the widow lady, hastily; "that is," added she, correcting herself—"I think a great deal about it, of course; we should all think constantly about Heaven, you know; but really, I can't say—I don't know—you're such a little child. Suppose you go to Bertha, now, Isabella, my dear; and see if she won't show you some pictures, or some toys, or something or other, that will amuse you; so run away, there's a dear child: good-bye, good-bye." She nodded her out of the room, half smiling, half gaping at her, as Isabella obediently disappeared.

But instead of going to Bertha, the child went up into the lonely suite of chambers above, where she loitered about among the old pictures in their worm-eaten frames, antique commodes, and spiral-legged tables, and carved chairs, and dim Venetian mirrors; her thoughts rambling among subjects as odd, obscure, crooked, and puzzling, as these objects that surrounded her.

Isabella sat, in one of the deep-recessed windows, leaning her elbow upon the sill, and looking straight before her, without seeing anything, so deeply absorbed was she in her train of thought. But at length, glancing through the open casement at which she sat, her eyes rested upon a certain quiet shady plot of ground, which, though surrounded by a high wall, could, from that particular upper window be overlooked.

This green, retired spot, had peculiar charms for the solitary child. It was a solemn, almost a gloomy-looking garden; and yet to the eyes of that lonely child it was a green bower of delight. It was a convent-garden; and Isabella found a strange mysterious pleasure in seeing those dark figures moving to and fro, with sombre flowing garments, and black veils, and bent heads, and measured pace, beneath and among the trees.

There was one nun, an especial favourite with her; one, for whose appearance she watched with eagerness, and whom, when she did appear, the child followed in every movement with peculiar interest.

This nun seemed to share her little observer's fondness for the garden; for rarely did she come there, without some implement in her hand, with which she sedulously applied herself to

trim the edges of the lawn, to prune stray twigs, or tend the few flowers that were sparingly allowed to adorn the place.

On the morning in question, when Isabella cast her eyes towards the convent-garden, hoping to behold her favourite nun, they sparkled with delight when she saw her already there, training the branches of some ivy that were flaunting idly away from the stem of a tree, round which they should have clung.

As the child wistfully looked towards the figure she knew so well, and watched that serenely pensive face, her longing to hold nearer communion with this person so loved, though so unknown, took possession of her with strength sufficient to urge her starting up, and making her way through the suite of deserted rooms, as if bent on some resolved purpose.

"Frau Leerheim said papa would not approve of my wandering so far again; but the convent is not far—I know the large iron gate—it is only in the next street. I'll go there, and peep in at the gate, and—perhaps—it may lead into the garden—I may perhaps see my nun herself there."

Thinking thus, Isabella soon was loitering near the tall grated portal, peering in, with an eager look, and a heart beating with expectation.

It beat with something like fear, when a very starch lay-sister, the portress, approached, and asked her if she wanted anything or anybody.

The tone in which this was said, however, reassured the child; and she said:—"If you please, ma'am, I should like very much to walk in your beautiful garden, if you think I could be allowed."

"It isn't my garden, my dear, I am only sister Gretchen; call me so, and not 'ma'am,' when you speak to me. But I'll try and get Reverend mother's leave—that's the abbess here, my dear—for you to walk in the convent garden, if you wish it. I don't see that little innocent feet like yours can do the place any harm—and I dare say Reverend mother will think so too. Walk in, my dear, and I'll ask her for you."

The starch-looking but kindly-spoken portress trotted away; and soon returned with the expected permission.

"You're neighbour Leerheim's little girl—or rather, the little

girl that lives at her house, an't you?" said the portress, with the inquisitiveness and talkativeness of her vocation, both official and spiritual.

Isabella answered in the affirmative.

"Very well, my dear; and I shall be glad to let you in and out, as often as you please to come and go; so now run about and amuse yourself, to your little heart's content."

Isabella, left to herself, looked about her eagerly, trusting to discover her favourite nun in some of the paths, or near to some of the flower-beds.

Her hope was fulfilled. Yet now that she had the opportunity so much desired, she hung back timidly with a still more beating heart than when she had stood anxiously peering in at the gate.

She fixed her eyes on those of the nun, as she turned in surprise at seeing a strange little girl so close to her,—for Isabella had crept to her side unperceived,—and putting her hand softly into that which belonged to the gentle being whose face had so often filled her with comfort, she drew the hand against her fluttering heart, and said:—"Will you love Isabella? She loves you very dearly."

"And who is Isabella?" said the nun; "though she is a winning little creature, I see. But how comes she to love me, I wonder? I have never seen her before, that I know of."

"But she has seen you, though, very often;" said the child, pointing upwards with a smile, that yet did not take from the earnest gravity of her manner.

She seemed a seraph, such as this nun, accustomed to contemplate images of angelic guardianship, might almost fancy permitted to look down upon human aspiration; but she was assured of the little one's claim to mere mortal childhood by the matter-of-fact way in which it pointed out an upper window of a high house not far off, saying:—"There, from that window up there, I could see you every day, and watch you gardening, and learn to love you. And I longed so much to come to you—and love you near—and ask you to love me—and to let me be with you often; and so—and so—I am come."

The gentle nun did not belie the impression her distant appearance had produced upon the watching child. She was as

good as she seemed; and willingly did she accept her self-elected disciple.

Day after day found her punctually at the side of sister Aloysia for the entire space of the allotted three hours; her mind and her body reaped benefit alike, in these daily three hours spent in the open air, and in the good nun's converse. Her energies, moral, mental, and physical, acquired strength and power beneath these propitious influences.

Isabella's dreaming infancy was succeeded by a happy childhood, fostered by a pure, a wise, a tender monitress. The baby visions of seeking Heaven by actual roads and active walking, perplexed her no more; the 'right path' was patiently and reverently explained to her to mean, not an earthly highway, but an earthly course, through besetting temptations, corruption, and vicious example.

Her aspiration thus indulged, yet directed aright; the young child's vague desire became a rational hope, none the less spiritual that it was now based upon a knowledge of the truth. It was sublimated; from an impulse it had become a creed. And the little creature who had almost more than mortal aspect, now that her soul had been taught to behold its veritable immortal hope, looked indeed little less than one of the angels.

While still a child, Isabella was once taken, by Frau Leerheim, for a drive on the Prater. When there, the widow lady got out, and walked for a while beneath the trees, taking the child with her.

Suddenly, Isabella broke away from madame Leerheim's side, and ran towards two young women she saw at a little distance.

"Nanni, dear Nanni! I'm so glad I've found you at last;" she said to one of them; "I've often thought about you, and wished to see you again. Don't you remember me? I'm Isabella, the little girl you were so kind to, that day, when I lost my way."

Nanni was about to fling her arms about the child, and give vent to her delight at seeing her again; but madame Leerheim coming up at the instant, Nanni drew back, glancing at the widow's indignant face, who exclaimed:—

"Why, Isabella, my dear, how came you to be talking to such people?—Come away, directly. Tyeh! tyeh! tyeh!" concluded the widow Leerheim; her climax of distress and perplexity finding vent in those half articulate sounds formed by the tongue against the roof of the mouth, imperfectly represented by the above words.

"Go, go, dear;" whispered Nanni hurriedly; "best go."

Isabella looked for a moment fixedly into the girl's face, and seeing how earnest she was, let go her hold; when Nanni turned away, and, with the other young woman, walked quickly out of sight among the trees.

For a few minutes, madame Leerheim remained fixed to the spot in speechless indignation—but when they were again seated in the carriage, her vexation found vent in murmurs.

"Where you can have picked up such acquaintances, I can't think, for my part;" said she. "Such a disgrace! such a degradation! I really don't know what I should have done, had any of my acquaintances seen us near them, much less speaking to them! How on earth did you ever come to meet with such creatures, child?"

"Creatures, ma'am! I only met one of them before; I only knew her,—Nanni—she was very kind to me, though she seemed very unhappy herself."

"So she ought to be;" said the widow, with a toss of her head.

"Ought to be! *Ought* any one to be unhappy?"

"Let me tell you, child," said Frau Leerheim snappishly, for it was wonderful how tart her usual insipid tone could be, on occasion; "let me tell you, it's very rude to echo people when they speak. You ought to know, Isabella, that it's the height of ill-breeding to repeat people's words, when they're talking to you."

Isabella meantime thought that she would, on the morrow, refer to sister Aloysia the many questions she had to ask, secure of explanation, however perplexing they might be; and she was just wondering how it happened that she should never yet have mentioned her former adventure with Nanni, to her friend the nun, when, as she looked from the carriage-window, she

caught sight of Nanni turning down one of the by-alleys that threaded the suburbs. She noted the spot, and determined to return to it at some future time; for her true heart longed to pay some of the debt of kindness it acknowledged. And then the child recalled the look with which the poor creature had said:—"you do me good, you make me happier than I ever expected to be again." And she resolved that she would come again, and try to do her good, and to make her happy, in return for what she had done for her.

It was not many hours, ere she had an opportunity of carrying her purpose into effect. In the afternoon, Frau Leerheim, lulled by the combined effects of a morning drive, and of a more than hearty dinner,—for the widow's well-meaning amounted to well-doing in the matter of eating,—slept soundly in her easy chair; and Isabella, knowing that these naps of the good lady were profound and prolonged, determined to go and find out Nanni at once.

Isabella had no difficulty in finding out the turning she had marked Nanni taking in the morning; and she soon reached the house, where she had been taken by Nanni on the first evening of their meeting.

She stepped to the door, and was about to tap at it; but it yielded even to the light push of her childish hand; and she stood upon the threshold.

So noiseless was her entrance, that it was merely the effect of variation in the light, caused by the opening door, which made Nanni look up from the abstracted attitude in which she sat, lost in thought; and then she saw the fair image of the child, standing in the afternoon sunbeams which streamed through the doorway. Flooded thus, in the rich gold and purple effulgence, and with her own clear cheek and brow, ethereal bearing, and purity of look, the little girl had even more than her usual appearance of spiritual beauty; she seemed a thing of glory and beatitude, sent in pity to mortal frailty.

"I have found you out, Nanni; I am come to see you, to thank you—I could not thank you this morning and tell you how often I have thought of you since that day you were so kind to me."

"Dear little angel, is it you? I was thinking of you—and wondering should I ever see you again. Every night, since that one on which I took you home, I have been to the street where you live, and looked up at your house, and wished you, in my heart, good-night, and sweet sleep, and happy dreams, in return for the blessed thought that innocent young face has been to me ever since I first beheld it."

"And I mean to come and find you here, often, to chat with you, and tell you how I love you. You will let me come and see you, won't you, dear Nanni?" urged the child persuasively.

"I must not—I dare not;" answered Nanni, resuming her disturbed look and manner. "Even now, I am injuring you, by letting you stay here; dear little creature, you must go—you must—you must." And she passionately kissed one of the long bright curls that hung about the child's fair throat. "Go, dear, indeed you must."

"Since I must—good-bye—God bless you, good kind Nanni!" And Isabella was gone. As the door closed upon the child's departing figure, Nanni's head sank upon her hands, and she exclaimed in a broken voice—"'good and kind' only, in wringing my own heart, that I may for once do what I know to be right."

She sat thus for a few minutes, plunged in bitterness of thought; then she started up, determining to follow the child, and watch her, from a distance, safely home.

Time passed; and found the tenor of Isabella's daily life unaltered. Her father's profession still detained him absent from Vienna and his children. Madame Leerheim's house was, as before, their appointed home; Claudio remained at college; while Isabella had masters, belonging to the school which was part of the convent establishment, at the same time deriving her principal instruction—her moral culture—from the gentle nun, sister Aloysia.

Once, while yet a very young girl, Isabella happened to be taking a walk, attended by Bertha. A croud approached. It proved to be some soldiers, who were conducting to prison a Bohemian lad, suspected of having murdered a young com-

panion. There was a train of idlers accompanying the military and their prisoner, hooting, and hissing, and reviling him, as he passed along. He was bound, and led between two soldiers; his wild hair hung dishevelled over his eyes, which now and then gleamed forth savage glances of anger towards the pitiless mob.

"I'm glad they've caught the young ruffian!" ejaculated mistress Bertha.

"Glad!" echoed Isabella.

"Yes, glad, miss; I'm sure it was he." And then the damsel recounted what she had heard of his suspected crime.

"But how can you be sure, Bertha, that it was he who did the murder? Even they who took him, are not sure;" said Isabella.

"O, I'm sure; I'm quite sure;" said the damsel. "Look at him, miss; only look at him! There's a murdering face for you, clear enough. Only look at it!"

Just then, the procession halted; the officer who conducted the party stopped to let his horse drink at a fountain that stood there. The Bohemian stood panting, dusty, with blood-shot eyes, parched tongue, and lips apart, looking like a goaded animal, at bay.

As he stood thus, only a few paces from the doorway, where Isabella and her attendant had taken refuge, the kerchief that hung loosely round the lad's neck, became entirely detached, and fell to the ground. The thoughtless croud laughed, in derision at the convulsive movement with which the bound arms twitched, as if they would have made an effort to recover the fallen handkerchief; but the laugh had not died away, when Isabella stepped forward, and in her own quiet grave manner, took it from the ground, and placed it in the lad's jacket-pocket.

The restless eyes gleamed—but with another expression then; a look of surprise, of almost tenderness, dwelt in them, in place of the ire that sparkled there before, as they fell upon the gentle beneficence at his side.

He had scarcely endeavoured to mutter huskily:—"Thanks!" —when the procession resumed its way.

"Good gracious, miss Bella!" said the damsel, "How could you pick up that filthy rag of a handkerchief?"

"Nobody else took it up for him; he could not lift it for himself;" said Isabella.

"Then there it might have lain, for me, I'm sure;" said Bertha; "I should as soon have thought of touching a toad, as a murderer's neckerchief. A hempen cravat's the only one I'd think of helping him to, I warrant him."

Isabella did not answer any farther; but next morning, she asked her friend the nun, how it was that no one but herself, in all that croud of people, had seemed to think of assisting one so helpless and unhappy as this boy prisoner.

"They believed him to be guilty as well as unhappy;" was the nun's reply.

"They could not be sure that he was guilty—that he had committed murder;" said Isabella; "for Bertha told me that his crime had not been proved. Ought they to have treated him as a wicked wretch, unworthy of help, until they were quite certain he was not as innocent as they?"

"Crouds seldom consider; mobs rarely deal justly;" said the nun.

After a pause, Isabella resumed:—"I wonder whether this Bohemian lad—Barnardine, Bertha said his name was,—really did kill his companion. He seemed such a boy, to have done so great a crime. Do you think he's guilty?"

"I have no means of judging, my child;" said the nun. "The best I can hope for him, is, that those who have, will use them quickly."

"Do you think his trial will be delayed?" asked Isabella.

"I know not; but I fear it;" replied sister Aloysia. "Our young duke, Vincentio, is a retired man; a scholar, rather than a governor; and this is hardly fitting in a prince who has the weal and moral condition of his subjects committed to his care. However, Vincentio is virtuous. Let us hope all good from his reign."

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As Isabella advanced in girlhood, her childish innocence, became scarcely less a part of her nature; but it took the

form of ideality, that bade her seek communion with things above this world. She had still that look of spirituality, which distinguished her as a child. Her very garments appeared to have a property of cleanness and purity, as if no soil or blemish could attach to them. White-robed, spotless, she looked, and moved, a virgin saint.

Yet with all this native immaculacy, she was neither intolerant nor uncharitable with regard to sin in others. It was only when convinced that crime was spontaneously committed, that her indignation was aroused. Then that latent warmth of disposition,—against which sister Aloysia had warned her,—would lead her into an energy of expression, compounded of generous feeling and disdain. It was rarely that such occasions presented themselves; but when they did, it was startling to hear one so apparently calm, pour forth such passionate declamation.

One morning Isabella was on her way to the nun, when she suddenly felt some one touch her timidly on the arm, and turning, she saw a woman at her side, whom, after a moment, she remembered to have seen walking with Nanni on the Prater, when she had met her there with Madame Leerheim.

"I beg your pardon, miss," said the woman, "but you seemed so deep in thought, I could not get you to notice me; so I made bold to——" she glanced at the elbow she had touched.

"What have you to tell me? Aught of poor Nanni? Speak; tell me!" said Isabella earnestly.

"Poor Nanni, indeed! Well may you call her so. She is dying, poor wench,—and frightfully; O, how frightfully!"

The woman broke off with a sob, and turned away.

"Dying! Where? Lead me to her;" said Isabella.

"Then you will go to her, will you?" said the woman, turning again quickly to Isabella. "That is her hope. She says she dares ask you to come and see her now, as she is dying. Death makes all even; it makes the good forget to despise the wicked—the rich to neglect the poor. Coffins are sometimes not grudged, where timely help would have been better. But,"

continued the woman, "If you come, it must be soon, for she won't last long."

The woman shuddered, and then added; "you must prepare your tender heart—Nanni says you have a tender heart—and I see you have—for a shock. Her sufferings are frightful, poor wench; and now that she has once owned her state, she don't mind letting us see her writhe in torture, or hear her scream; which before, she managed to keep from doing, that we mightn't find her out, and have a doctor."

"She set her heart upon seeing you, and I couldn't refuse her, poor wench, when she begged me to fetch you;" said the woman, in conclusion; "I shall comfort her by carrying word back that you've promised to come."

"I shall not fail;" said Isabella. "Tell poor Nanni that I shall be with her not long after you return."

The woman, wiping her eyes on her shawl, turned away; and Isabella resumed her way to the convent; for she determined to see sister Aloysia before she went to Nanni, remembering her promise, that she would not go to her house again without the nun's permission. The good nun at once bade her go; sending a lay-sister with her, to carry a basket of necessaries and comforts for the sufferer.

They reached the suburbs; and on tapping at the door of the small low-roofed house, it was opened by the woman who had brought Nanni's message to Isabella. She put her finger on her lips, as they entered, and whispered:—"The poor wench sleeps; I found her in a happier way on my return, than when I left her; the pain's suddenly gone—no more of those dreadful screams and writhings—she's quiet now—and able to sleep."

"Best not disturb her;" said Isabella, in the same tone; and she proceeded to make her arrangements for staying to watch by Nanni's bedside, dismissing the lay-sister, telling her she would send and let her know if any decided change took place, which should require assistance. She then, thanking the woman who had hitherto nursed Nanni, begged her to take some repose, which she was sure she must need, after so much fatigue and anxiety.

Nanni's slumber lasted uninterruptedly for some hours. Mortification had come on; and, freed from pain, she was able to sleep.

She awoke refreshed; and uttered her companion's name,—the woman who had tended her during her illness.

"Dear Nanni, I am here to take care of you, now; you will be pleased to have me for your nurse, will you not?" said the gentle voice of Isabella.

"And so you are come, angel that you are! I knew you would!" The dying girl fixed her eyes on Isabella's face, with a look of full content. "You are the same pure angel, that you looked to me, when a child! You were always more like a spirit of light and goodness, than a mere mortal creature, like —like ourselves."

She turned her head feebly away, and sighed, and said:—"You are come—because your good heart bade you come—and because it suspected nothing that should keep you away —but perhaps, if you knew——"

"I know all;" was Isabella's quiet reply.

Nanni's head turned more quickly now,—as quickly as her weakness would allow,—towards Isabella. Fixing her eyes upon her, she repeated emphatically, "you know all?"

Isabella, without averting her own, bowed assent.

Through the watches of the night, Isabella kept faithful vigil by Nanni's bed-side. The sufferer had sunk into rest, calmed and composed by the serene trust in Almighty mercy, which her gentle nurse had sought to inspire; but just as the grey dawn crept through the checked curtains of the cottage-window, Isabella perceived that that rest would never again be broken. Slumber had subsided into death; and Nanni's cares were over.

Isabella arose; composed the limbs, and disposed all smoothly and reverently around the poor frail tenement of clay; then knelt, praying long and fervently for the erring spirit now fled to meet its fiat for eternity. She was still thus lowly and earnestly pleading, when the lay-sister softly opened the door of the cottage.

"The poor thing is dead, is she?" whispered the nun, as Isabella rose from her knees. "I knew she could not survive many hours; so as soon as matins were finished, I came to see if all were over, and to fetch you home."

Some of the women from the neighbouring house were summoned; and then Isabella and the lay-sister took their way back to the convent. As they passed through the empty streets, quite deserted and solitary at that early morning hour, the sky chill and grey before the rising of the sun, and her thoughts still absorbed in the mournful story and scene which had so lately occupied her, Isabella's heart sank in dejection.

Presently, a party of military approached, leading a heavily-ironed man, whom they were conducting to prison. As Isabella's eyes fell upon the culprit, she was struck by the singular resemblance he bore to her brother Claudio. The height, age, and general appearance were very like; and the light brown colour of the hair and beard were precisely similar. She started as the thought crossed her mind:—"Can it be my brother, that the impending ill threatens? Heaven shield my Claudio!"

Her companion, whose retired life as a nun did not prevent her taking a lingering interest in mundane affairs, asked one of the guard, who was the criminal they were leading to prison; and she learned that it was Ragozine, the noted pirate.

Full four years had elapsed since the death of Nanni, when one fine autumn, Claudio came to his sister in high spirits, telling her he had an invitation for them both to spend the vacation at a country house, some miles from the city. It belonged to a family, with whom Claudio had formed an acquaintance; and he and his sister were requested to join the festivities, with which, according to annual custom, the vintage was about to be celebrated.

The brother and sister, with the rest of the guests, were welcomed, on their arrival in the vineyards, by rejoicings, firing of pistol shots, and flourishes of trumpets and horns. Gay awnings, and arboured seats, were distributed about the grounds. Flags were flying, and the peasantry were dressed in their

holiday attire, shouting, and singing, and dancing, during the intervals of their bacchanalian labour. The vines spread their flaunting arms laden with rich foliage, and richer fruitage, on all sides; proffering their luxuriance of beauty and of enjoyment.

The family-party was assembled to receive the guests. It consisted of the host, Erasmus; his wife, Theresa; and their only daughter, Juliet; who supported the steps of an aged man, her godfather, Anselmo. This old gentleman doted to such excess on his god-daughter, that he could not live away from her; and he had accordingly taken up his abode in her father's house, frequently declaring that she should be sole heiress of all he possessed. He was very wealthy, and not a little whimsical; but his whims were tolerated for the sake of his wealth. His principal whim was, to have his darling Juliet in constant attendance upon him; he would never willingly have suffered her to stir from his side, and in deference to his wish, the young girl scarcely ever quitted it for an instant.

It was glorious autumnal weather, warm and genial; and the old man's easy-chair was brought out every morning during the festival, and placed on the lawn, whence he could command a view of the vineyards, and of all the joyous groups that idled in them. Over the back of his chair hung his darling god-child.

"She is my treasure, my joy, my sole delight;" said the old gentleman, in answer to something Claudio had said. "She is youth and health, eyesight, hearing, everything to me. But, bless her, she shall find I am grateful—yes, I am grateful. I'll give her what is the best part of me,—my money,—as she generously bestows upon me, herself. All in good time—all in good time, though;" said the old gentleman, chuckling and nodding with a knowing air; "I can't give it her till I've done with her, for fear she should take it in her giddy little head to fly away from me, and leave me, after all."

"Let me put this cosy thing round your throat, godpapa;" said Juliet; "you know I knitted it for you myself—and this is the very time for you to wear it."

"She does just as she pleases with me, you see;" said the

old gentleman, turning, with evident pride and delight in her despotism, to Claudio, who was standing near, and who indeed had hovered in the vicinity of the easy-chair for the last several hours; "see what it is to be a fond old godpapa, submitting to be tyrannized over by a young hussy who knows her power but too well."

"She seems to use it very pleasantly, and very gently too;" said the young man, watching the little hands, that, spite of their being gloved, deftly arranged the folds of the comforter round the old gentleman's neck.

"Yes, yes—I don't know but I'm well off in my slavery. She knows how to make her chains sit easily, and prevent the galling of the fetters;" said the old gentleman, with his favourite chuckle.

"Pardon me, sir; but it seems rather you, here, who impose fetters;" said Claudio. "Do you not enjoy the glory of attaching this fair captive to your chariot-wheels? She has not quitted the side of that triumphant car of yours—your easy-chair,—for five minutes during the day."

"Ah ha! young gentleman, you would fain lead her away as a partner in the dance, I dare say;" said Anselmo, with his knowing nod; "but I can't spare her—I can't spare her."

"I have no wish to dance, I assure you, sir;" replied Claudio; "I am well content to stay here as another captive, enchained in pleasant talk. I do not care to dance this evening; I think I must have turned my foot; it scarcely amounts to a sprain—but my ankle is sufficiently uneasy to make me feel no wish to dance." As Claudio said this, he could perceive, spite of the dim light,—that Juliet's fair head turned quickly towards him, as if in interest awakened by his words.

"Juliet, my dear child, you should yourself put something round your throat;" said Anselmo. "Your shawl lies in the hall; you must put it on; I will send for it."

"I know where it is; I will fetch it, sir!" exclaimed Claudio, darting across the lawn, towards the house.

"Humph!" muttered the old gentleman, following the figure

of the young man with his eyes, as it bounded over the lamp-lit open space; "tolerably fast running, that, for a man with a turned foot!" adding to himself:—"If it's as I suspect, I'll make so bold as just to give the young spark a hint. I'm not going to have my little Julietta lured away from me, yet awhile. No, no; all in good time; all in good time."

When Claudio returned with the shawl, he took the privilege of himself placing it round the beautiful figure, as it bent over the old man's chair.

"What is that you're doing? O ay,—putting her shawl on —ay, ay. Come round here on the other side of me, young gentleman; I hear best on this side; my right ear is a little deaf."

"And yet you let Juliet usually stand on that side, sir;" said Claudio.

"Juliet? O ay,—I hear her well enough; I'm accustomed to her voice;" said old Anselmo. "I know its every tone by heart. I can't spare one vibration of it for any body else. I'm well nigh jealous of every word she gives her parents; judge if I'll let her bestow them on any one else. And as for any such impertinents as wooers or suitors, we'll have nothing to say to them, will we, Julietta, my darling? We won't spare them so much as a syllable, a single sigh. My little girl's not to be won till her old godfather can spare her, and that'll never be till he's in his grave. Then she shall have all his money—not a penny before,—and she shall do what she pleases with it, and give it to him who shall win her and wear her. And then, but not till then, I say, joy go with her and the man of her choice, whoever he may be."

"Why not help her to make her choice, that you may be sure he is worthy of her?" said Claudio.

"I am the best judge of what is my own pleasure, my dear young gentleman;" said Anselmo; "and I am quite sure that it would be no pleasure to me to give up my little darling to a husband. But bless me, it must be very late. See, the dancing is over. They are all going towards the house. Give me your arm, my darling; and you, my good young gentleman, let me take yours also; and I will go at once

to my own room. I am growing quite a rake, keeping such hours; but I always say, Julietta makes me a boy again; she gives me her youth."

It was noon the next day; when,—the party all assembled in the drawing-room, Juliet as usual hanging over her godfather's chair, a letter was placed in Claudio's hands. It was addressed to himself and Isabella, by their father, and had been just forwarded express from Vienna. It contained a hasty summons to his children, to meet him there immediately, as he hoped to obtain a short leave of absence previous to an intended expedition against the enemy.

The young lover turned pale, as his sister delightedly announced to the company, their near prospect of beholding the father she so longed to embrace.

"We shall be sorry to lose you, my dear young friends;" said Erasmus and Theresa, "but it is natural that you should be eager to join your father immediately. Orders shall be given, that you may set forth without loss of time."

While her father and mother were saying this, Juliet had ventured one look at Claudio; and then, without a word, dropped upon the floor. She had swooned.

"Dear child! dear child!" sobbed her old godfather. "Lift her gently, there, there; bear her to the window; the air will revive her; she will be better presently. She stands too long by my chair; she shall have a seat by me, in future."

When Juliet recovered, she found Claudio no longer in the room. He and his sister, she heard, were gone to prepare for immediate departure to Vienna. She strove to command herself; and steadily resisted all recommendations to withdraw, lest she might not see them before they left. Isabella and Claudio re-entered the room to take leave of their friends. While his sister was bidding farewell to Anselmo, and thanking Erasmus and his wife for their hospitality, the lover found means to convey unobserved a letter into his Juliet's hands. With this treasure, the moment the brother and sister were gone, the young girl hastened to her own room, and there devoured these words:—

"Juliet—my bride—my wife!

"A mandate, you would be the last to bid me disregard, calls me from you. But I shall return with favouring nightfall. Let the secret of our loves rest within our own hearts, until such time as I can proclaim you mine with befitting triumph. I have been, till now, too unthrifty of my time and means. Love will teach me prudence and industry, that I may build a fortune worthy of your acceptance; unless, meantime, it please Heaven to endow you with the one promised by Anselmo. I shall have to watch lest the eagerness of love bid me grudge the old man his short season of remaining life. But since your godfather wills that your dower be thus shut within his coffers, until his death frees it and you—I will not be so selfish as to withdraw you from a home where you now command ease and luxury, by asking you to share that of a poor student. We will wait until the poor student shall have earned one worthy of you, or until you yourself shall be so rich as to offer him one. You see, his faith in your love allows him not to doubt that you will do so. Till then, receive as your husband, in heart, in all, save ceremonial form,

"Your lover,
"the happy
"CLAUDIO."

On arriving in Vienna, the brother and sister found their hope disappointed, of seeing their father already there. No tidings reached them concerning him, but then a rumour came, of there having been an unexpected assault on the part of the enemy—an engagement—a fatal loss of officers; and among these fell the father of Claudio and Isabella.

So sudden a defeat to all her hopes of beholding her sole surviving parent, was a shock indeed to the filial piety of Isabella. It put the crowning desire to the inclination she had always felt for a conventual life; and she besought sister Aloysia, to obtain the reverend prioress's sanction, that she might become one of the holy sisterhood without delay.

On the very day she was to commence the season of her pro-

bation, as a novice of St. Clare, she was speaking with one of the holy sisters, concerning the duties and observances of the order, that she might strictly abide by them all; and she said: —"*And have you nuns no farther privileges?*"—MEASURE FOR MEASURE, Act i. Sc. v.



TALE VII.

KATHARINA AND BIANCA; THE SHREW AND THE DEMURE.

THERE was a large entertainment given at the country-house of signior Gremio, to which signior Baptista Minola's little girls, among other young people, were invited. The elder of the two, Katharina, was a spirited, lively child, whose unchecked sallies were fast becoming flippancy; whose glibness of retort and unbridled freedom of tongue were speedily leading her into insufferable pertness. She had no judicious mother, to train the insolence into sprightliness,—to teach her to mingle gentleness with her native vivacity, which might thus have been subdued into winning playfulness. Bianca, the younger, was a child of totally different disposition; she was meekly stubborn, and had a remarkable method of getting her own way. Bianca was always very shocked at Katharina's defects, and this gained her immense credit in public opinion; which ranked the one sister as highly as it rated low the other. Signior Gremio had made the party a juvenile one, in compliment to his son; whom he considered still a boy, though he was past forty years of age. The octogenarian had so long been in the habit of looking upon him as a child, compared with himself, that he really thought of him in no other light. The son had always been called young signior Gremio, to distinguish him from his father; and this had farther helped the notion.

There was to be dancing; sports and games of all kinds; and a tent was spread in the grounds, with a cold collation.

The old gentleman bustled about with as much animation as his tottering limbs would allow.

"Where's my boy?" he would exclaim at intervals; "Oh, yonder; I see him. Among that group of lads; but he should be over here, helping me to receive his young lady guests."

"Here comes your middle-aged man," said Katharina—"your boy, I mean."

"My dear boy;" said his father, "here are some young ladies dying with impatience for a dance. Set one afoot, pr'ythee."

"Will miss Bianca favour me with her hand?" said the son, with a flourish of his hat under his arm.

"My sister has too much grace, to like to see grey hairs stand uncovered before her;" said Katharina. "Pray put on your hat, signior, lest you take cold in your head."

"Fie, sister; how can you?" murmured Bianca, as she put her hand into the gentleman's arm; who led her away, looking mightily disconcerted.

"You mustn't be left without a partner, my dear miss;" said the old gentleman to Katharina. "Let's see what we can do for you. Here, Giulio!" cried he, calling to a young lad, who was cracking and eating 'pignoli' at a little distance; "come hither, child; and offer thy hand to this young lady."

The lad lounged towards them, glanced at Katharina's face, and said, "I'm afraid."

"'Afraid!' I shan't eat it;" said she.

"I don't know that;" he answered. "You look as if you'd snap at anything that comes in your way; but as I've no fancy for scars, I shan't trust my skin near you, nor offer my hand to any such miss Miscetta, I thank you, miss Minola."

"Do you call me a cat, sirrah?" said she, with sparkling eyes.

"Dear, dear, what am I to do with these quarrelsome children!" exclaimed the old gentleman in great perplexity. "My dears, will you be so obliging as to keep quiet, just for a minute, till I can call somebody to part you? O, here, son, Gremio!—I'm glad the dance is over; you're come in happy time to preserve peace. Our young friends are falling out, I fear me."

"Come you with me, Giulio;" said the younger signior

Gremio; "let you and me go seek some refreshment for these young ladies."

"Bring some 'cedrata,' or 'limonata;' they are iced, and will be pleasant;" said his father.

"Better a little 'semata;' are not the others too sour, think you, sir?" said Giulio; "we have acid enough, already."

"Pert monkey!" muttered Katharina.

"Never mind him, my dear;" said her host. "He doesn't mean any harm, bless you; it's only his joke. Giulio's always full of his jokes."

"I wish he'd keep his jokes for those who like 'em—I don't;" said she; "and if he treats me to any more of them, I shall just——"

She was interrupted by the return of the younger signior Gremio with some fruit and cakes, which he presented to the sisters.

Katharina had no sooner helped herself to some strawberries, than master Giulio stepped forward, and pouring some cream over them, said mischievously, "mew, mew; have a little milk, pussy?"

"The next instant, the whole contents of her plate were chucked in his face.

"My dears,—my dears,—pray—pray!" said the old gentleman.

"Now why should she be so enraged when I liken her to a cat, if she didn't feel the truth of the portrait?" laughed Giulio. "I'll be bound her sister wouldn't be angry, though, if I should tell her she were like a cat,—and yet she has nearly as much of a cat in her, as t'other."

"Who—I?" said Bianca, in soft wonder.

"Yes, you, you; mew, mew;" said the boy, mimicking her way of speaking. "You sit there, with your fore-feet primly before you; your eyes demurely winking; your sleek looks, and your pur-pur-purry voice. And then you've got such velvet paws;" said he, touching the back of her hand. "I hope they conceal no claws."

"Don't make too sure of that;" said Katharina; "velvet paws can put forth talons as sharp as razors,—and that, when you think it least."

"At any rate, they're kept in reserve;" said he; "and I confess, of the two, I prefer the velvet-pawed cat, to the fierce, green-eyed, spread-clawed cat; if you'll permit me a choice, miss Miscetta Minola."

"I care nothing," returned she, "for your tastes or your preferences; but I'll thank you to call neither my sister nor myself, a cat, any more; and I give you fair warning, that if you hint at such a thing again, I'll give you a sound a box o'the ear."

"No, will you really, Miscetta?" said he.

Slap came a swinging cuff against the side of his head; but as he only laughed, and repeated "puss, puss, puss," a shower of blows followed; and grasping a few clumps of his hair in one hand, she fairly belaboured him with the other, until signior Gremio the younger, assisted by one or two of the other guests, came to the rescue, and drew her off.

Giulio was still roaring with laughter, as he shouted, "O never mind. See, the bird is still unwounded by Kate Cat! He will fly out of pussy's reach." Saying which, he caught hold of some low branches of a tree, and swung himself up among them. Here he remained, carelessly dangling his legs, and whistling; while he pulled some more 'pignoli' out of his pocket, and sat contentedly cracking and eating them.

By-and-by he varied his amusement by pelting the company with the shells; slily contriving that the major part of them should hit Katharina.

She looked up wrathfully. "How dare you?" she said.

"You see how I dare. Don't ye like it, Miscetta?"

"If you do it again, or say that again, I'll have my revenge;" said she furiously.

That same second, the words were repeated; and the next, a large stone that lay at Katharina's feet, was picked up, and flung violently into the midst of the tree.

It struck his temple; and stunned, he fell forwards. There was a rustle among the boughs—and then the lad dropped to the ground. The guests started up, in consternation; and raised him in their arms. Blood was oozing from the wound in his head; but he was insensible.

This incident abruptly broke up the party. The guests with-

drew, exclaiming at the ungoverned temper of the little girl who had occasioned the accident; the young lad was lifted into the house, while a surgeon was sent for to examine his hurts. The boy, thanks to his youth and his good constitution, recovered from his injuries, but signior Baptista was so shocked at the scandal, which this public exposure of the violence of his daughter's temper occasioned, that he resolved upon a step which he hoped might have the good effect of reforming her. He determined to place his two daughters in a convent, for the finishing of their education.

On the first introduction of the two daughters of signior Minola, they were presented in great state to the lady Abbess, who condescendingly made a little speech to them, telling them that she was sure they would prove shining ornaments to the holy community entitled "The Ladies of the Holy Petticoat," of which it was now their privilege to form a part.

"We're not going to become nuns—don't think it;" abruptly exclaimed Katharina.

"You would not be fit to become a nun, my child, with that rebellious tone of yours, which I fear betokens something of a rebellious spirit. But we'll soon set all that to rights; we'll soon tame down that wicked little lion of a spirit, till it becomes a lamb, a very lamb." And the lady Abbess smiled through her set teeth, and smiled through her half-closed eyes, as she looked at Katharina with a placid consciousness of power.

"Not to be a nun, I tell you!" was again repeated in a shriek.

"Sister, sister, remember it is the reverend lady Abbess you are speaking to!" interposed Bianca.

"What's that to you? or to me? Why need you interfere?" And a smart slap of the face followed.

"Tie that little vixen's hands behind her;" said the lady Abbess in a bland voice, to one or two of the nuns who stood nearest. Katharina kicked and struggled: but it was done.

"It was my intention to have given a little feast to welcome these two young ladies among us;" resumed the lady Abbess; "but since the elder has seen fit to conduct herself in a manner

as unexpected as it is reprehensible, she shall not be permitted to partake of the festivities, but shall be satisfied with dry bread."

"See if I eat it, though! I'd rather starve;" said Katharina.

"And now, sister Brigida, remove her;" added the Abbess, with her smile, and her even tone.

The scene in the refectory was such as had never before been witnessed in that place of discipline and order.

First the young ladies were marshalled in, Bianca among them, and took their places at the dining-tables; a nun presiding at the head of each.

Then the prisoner, Katharina, was ushered in, between two meek-looking nuns; and placed at a small table, upon which was a thick slice of bread upon a trencher.

But the moment her hands were untied, that she might commence her dinner, the first use she made of them was to skime both bread and trencher to the other end of the hall.

There was a look of amazement at her daring, upon all the school-girl faces turned towards her.

The meek-looking nuns refastened the knots upon her wrists, picked up the trencher and bread, and brought them back; but no sooner replaced before her, than table, and all, were knocked over with one kick of her foot.

The school-girl faces expressed increasing interest in this singular exhibition of persevering defiance.

"Reverend mother insists upon her eating it; she enjoined me to see her will performed;" said sister Brigida.

The meek-looking nuns again picked up the bread; broke it into morsels, and put some of them to Katharina's lips. She took one into her mouth, chewed it hastily, then sent forth the fragments in a shower of crumbs.

There was a titter ran through the ranks of scholars. The nuns began to feel there was danger to their supremacy, rather than salutary terror, in the example. They hastened, therefore, to procure an order from the Abbess, that the refractory newcomer should be lodged forthwith in a certain solitary chamber, devoted to the reception of culprits convicted of heinous offences.

Here, shut up in darkness, and debarred from all society, she was left to reflect upon her errors, and to learn repentance. At first she tore about the narrow space like a little wild thing, thumping at the doors, wrenching at the windows, and beating madly against the walls; then uttered shriek upon shriek, demanding in frantic shouts and screams to be let out; but when no sound reached her, in reply to her outcries, the echoes of her own voice seemed to mock her, and the silence that followed was like an insult.

Gradually, its continuance frightened her; it seemed to vanquish her by its sheer passive pertinacity. She did not intend to set about curing herself of insolence, or insubordination; but she thought she would henceforth take care so to keep them within rule, as not again to draw upon her the terrors of that dark solitude.

She kept her resolution tolerably well. She put severe constraint upon herself, so that her outbreaks should not come beneath the immediate notice of the lady Abbess, lest she should offend one who had power to order her to the dark room. Her violence of temperament was smothered; but it was not extinct. Fear may induce the show of submission; but love only can truly subjugate a haughty spirit.

There was just now another chance for this little girl to have been redeemed from her defect of disposition; but its influence was lost to her.

In the chapel belonging to the convent, there hung a picture of the marriage of St. Catherine. It represented the virgin saint, kneeling at the feet of the infant Saviour. By her side was the symbol of her martyrdom, the torturing wheel; but her face shone with holy fervour, as she bent to receive the ring of espousal from the hand of the sacred Babe, who leaned from his mother's lap to place it upon her finger. First, Katharina came to regard this picture with curiosity, as being that of her patron saint; then she loved to gaze upon it, for the sake of the benign expression upon the maternal countenance, for the sake of the radiant sweetness in the smile of the Babe, and for the sake of the heavenly aspiration on the face of the virgin-saint her namesake. She felt better, as well as

happier, while she gazed; and she would often linger behind her companions, when they left the chapel, that she might stay and enjoy the delicious frame of mind into which the contemplation of this picture threw her. Her daily vexations, her petulances, grievances, ill-humours, all faded from her view; she beheld nothing but the picture,—felt nothing but the beatitude it inspired.

One evening, after vespers, she remained thus absorbed, opposite the picture, when one of the nuns, who had missed her, returned to the chapel in quest of her.

"So, you are here, my dear child;" said the nun, in the confidential whisper peculiar to her vocation; "neither sister Fidelia, nor sister Brigida, nor sister Lucia, could imagine where you were; and they want you in the school-room; and they sent me to seek you; and to tell you that——".

"I wish you wouldn't hiss so;" interrupted Katharina, to whom the whispered chatter of the nun was insupportable; "can't you speak out what you have to say—and not ish-sh-sh-sh there, like a serpent."

"A serpent? Holy mother forbid!" ejaculated the nun, crossing herself hastily. "Far be it from me to bring anything belonging to the enemy of mankind here. But you know, Katharina, my dear, it isn't seemly to speak loud in chapel; so I must whisper what I have to say."

"And what have you to say?" said Katharina.

"Why, I told you before, only you're so pettish you never give yourself time to listen to what's said. They want you in the school-room for evening lessons."

"Pshaw! lessons! I was studying better here."

"Studying? you mean praying, I suppose, to your patron saint, blessed Santa Katharina. Only you should kneel to her, and not sit lounging there in your chair, when you pray."

"I wasn't praying;" replied she.

"What were you doing here, then, child?"

"I told you; studying. I was studying that glorious face to get it by heart."

"What do you mean, child? Studying a saint's face? getting it by heart? What bold, heathenish ideas! But it's of a

piece with your sitting, when you ought to be kneeling before the blessed picture."

"It is a blessed picture; but I feel its blessedness better when I'm sitting, than when I'm kneeling. My knees get stiff and cramped, and the pain distracts me from the sensation I have of the blessing of looking upon that face,—upon all the faces, for they are all beautiful and blessed."

"What a strange way you have of talking, child! Come; let us leave the chapel. If I hear any more such profanity, I shall have to report you to the Superior."

Although the nun did not actually carry a formal complaint to the lady Abbess about Katharina's profane ideas respecting this picture, yet it was whispered about, that Katharina had strange fancies of her own about the picture in question. A grand mystery was made of it—as of all occurrences there, however trivial. There was a general huddling of bended heads, and stolen glances in her direction, when next the school-girls repaired to chapel.

Katharina felt that she was observed,—watched; her wrath was rising; but she stifled her indignation, knowing that an outbreak in chapel would be severely punished. She sat, therefore, biting her lips, swelling, and swallowing; compressing her hands till the nails cut against the palms, casting scorching glances at her companions, in return for their inquisitive looks. But the moment service was over, and the chapel was quitted, she flamed out.

The tribe of girls was pouring forth into the play-ground, down a flight of stone steps which led into it; all rushing onwards, eager for play, and chattering at the top of their voices.

Presently, high and shrill above them all, sounded that of Katharina Minola.

"Stop! Come back, all of you! I want to speak to you! Stop, I tell you!"

Involuntarily they checked their steps, and stood in groups around the base of the stone staircase, at the head of which was Katharina, surveying them.

"What were you all staring at?"

A pause while the troop of school-girls looked at each other

giggling. All at once the giggles subsided; and a sudden gravity stole over the upturned faces.

Katharina, who was scanning them eagerly, perceived the change; and following the direction of their eyes, beheld the lady Abbess, standing close at her elbow. Confused thoughts of flinging herself against the reverend mother and tumbling her headlong down the flight of steps,—even a keen sense of the pleasure it would be to see one so dignified and imperturbable, bundling helplessly over,—flashed wildly through the brain of the child; but a second glance at the face and figure of the Superior, sufficed to show the folly of any such attempt. The shrewd glassy eye, the compressed lips, the folded arms, the firm erect mien, all told the utter futility of hoping to move —either physically or morally—such a woman.

She stood thus for some moments, transfixing her with those sharp, slantwise, glances; then she said, in her even voice:— "I have heard something of this. And so you do not like to be stared at, Katharina Minola? Then you should learn to comport yourself a little less singularly, my child. You shall learn to pray before a holy picture, as other people do, not study it. I desire you will repeat a thirty days' prayer, together with the seven penitential psalms, upon your knees, morning and evening, fasting, in front of that sacred picture; and may this penance serve to cleanse you of your past sin, and inspire you with more fitting thoughts for the time. *Pax vobiscum; et benedicite*, my child!"

"But I can't,—I won't"—began Katharina, passionately.

"You will either perform the penance I enjoin you, or go into solitary confinement for a week;" said the Abbess, as she withdrew.

Nothing less than the threatened terrors of the dark room, would have induced Katharina to go through with the other penance. As it was, she performed it; but how? In a spirit of repugnance, of mutiny, of all that was destructive to salutary effect. Ever after that period, Katharina as earnestly shunned, as she had formerly sought, looking upon that picture.

And now the annual distribution of prizes was about to take place.

It was a striking feature in this display, that all works of utility were omitted. Nothing but fancy-works, works that would *show* well, were included among those got up for the occasion. Of course, during the long period of preparation for all this, every useful lesson or solid acquirement was set aside.

Nothing was to be seen but pieces of satin, and silk, taffeta, lutestring, and brocade; beads, coloured papers, tinsel, gilded bordering, spangles, gauze, palettes dabbed with the gaudiest of paints, drawing-boards, cards, filagree, bran, embroidery, floss silks, worsteds, wools, ribbon, ivory, shells, feathers, wax, lace, pencils, paint-boxes, silver and gold wire, thread, cat-gut, gum, paste, varnish, bugles, gilt-foil, muslin, tissue-paper, velvet; all kind of smarteries in material,—all possible variety in bits, shreds, scraps, morsels, and small quantities.

And then, by degrees, this mass of trumpery was formed, modelled, and made up. Beneath the diligent fingers of the young ladies, aided by the skill and invention of the nuns, it shaped itself into innumerable objects of almost indescribable appearance and undiscoverable use, but which were collectively to be displayed as the works of the school—and to form that grand exhibition upon which the hearts of the young ladies and their parents were so fondly fixed, as the result of their year's schooling, and the source of the forthcoming prizes. There were pincushions—vast numbers of pincushions—of every size and shape; but the favourite kind of pincushion was a singular fabric of crimson satin crammed with bran, fashioned three-corner-wise, the two upper points of which being strained across the top and fastened together, the whole was supposed to form a striking resemblance to that mysterious organ, the human heart. This,—to be dangled at the side, by a long ribbon,—was considered a useful present to a faithful servant, or favourite nurse; at the same time that it afforded an affecting typical assurance of the fond attachment for home maintained by the young lady during her school-life. Upon the whole, perhaps, the pincushions were the most useful objects there; at any rate there was a definite and specific use to which they might be put. But for the most part, the articles constructed were purposeless; utterly devoid of any conceivable aim or avail whatever. There

were boxes so small that they would contain nothing; boxes so fragile that they would hold nothing; boxes with such inadhesive sides, insecure handles, and limp, intenible bottoms, that they were fit receptacles for nothing but dead flies or dust. There were heaps of artificial flowers, with nearly as little the shape, or hue of nature, as the smell; set under glass cases. There were waxen effigies of lambs, or babies, embedded in myriad filagree curls, closely wedged in flat boxes with glass lids. There were 'suonarelli,'—or rattles, made with patchwork, and gilt tape. There were 'pazienzi,'—nondescript things, supposed to be of great virtue, hung on the side, or round the neck; square bits of cloth, ornamented with sewing-silk, and trimmed with coloured ribbons, and pen-and-ink miniature figures of saints. There was more than one 'Presepio' of large size; a sort of holy peep-show, representing Bethlehem Stable, with wax figures stuck about. There were worsted worked prodigal sons, with black and white stitches for eyes; and a speckled wool calf in the distance: embroidered Ruths, with blue and white floss silk eyes, and pink floss cheeks, and yellow floss sheaves of corn; framed and glazed. There were certain fabrications, popularly believed to be meant for watch-pockets (were a watch among the family possessions),—or for reliquaries; these were fashioned of all conceivable varieties; octagonal, hexagonal, square, oval, round, and diamond-shaped; quilted, quilled, frilled, and rosetted; but invariably finished off with such slender hanging ribbons, that on putting these frail and treacherous pouches to the use for which they were professedly adapted, the watch or relic would disappear behind the bed's head —smash on to the floor. There were shell-work bags that would not bear anything put into them heavier or stronger than flue; feather, and rice, and wafer-baskets, that mightn't be touched, lest they should come ungummed, or unpasted, or unfixed. And then the things, by courtesy, called paintings! Daubs of heads, with mouths out of drawing, chins awry, eyes askew, nostrils formed by a dot or a scratch..

The grand day arrived. An ecclesiastical dignitary of eminence had promised to honour the proceedings with his presence. He was to be seated on a kind of throne, temporarily erected;

hung with garlands of artificial flowers, and plentifully besprinkled with spangles.

The guests, on arriving, were conducted through a suite of rooms, in which were long tables, covered with the school-works set out with elaborate care, so as to display them to the best advantage, and with slips of written paper pinned on each, bearing the name of the gifted young lady whose work it might be.

Suddenly there is a whisper runs among the crowd :—"Monsignore is arrived! Make way! make way!" The crowd draws back—there is a passage formed, through which Monsignore and the troop of attendant priests pass, in great state and dignity towards the great room. By dint of a great deal of coaxing, smiling, whispering, nodding, nudging, and pointing, the majority of the guests are seated. But there are still many standing; some flattened against walls, others jammed in recesses; while through the doorways, there appear vistas of straining heads, which, from their occasional bobbing disappearance, suggest the idea of their owners being on tiptoe.

However, there seems to be nothing of very thrilling interest going forward. There is a pause, during which a troublesome cough affects Monsignore; which the lady Abbess perceiving, she hands him a box of choice sweetmeats. He takes one, with such a look of saintly suavity, that it is positively touching to behold.

Presently, a door in one corner of the platform opens, and the young ladies of the school enter two and two, with their white veils drawn on each side of their faces, their eye-lids cast down, and their hands folded before them. At this point of time, there is a great stir among the straining heads; the tiptoes are perseveringly sustained; and some of the flattened and jammed against the walls and in recesses, take the opportunity of stepping on to some of the benches which their former occupants have in haste abandoned, in order to get a better sight, peering over the heads of those in front. There is much whispering, and pointing out of individuals among the just-entered school-girls, who take their seats upon the very edges of the forms, and remain with their eyes fixed upon the floor,

while one of their companions, together with one of the teacher-nuns, goes over towards the virginals, which they proceed to belabour with certain blows supposed to form a musical duet. As this progresses, the veiled young ladies venture to raise their eyes, cast sidelong glances into the room; and as they gradually discover their friends, bite their lips to prevent smiling, then risk another glance, then smile more openly, then nod, and at last, not only interchange looks of recognition with those they know, but actually take courage to stare at Monsignore himself.

The duet ended,—prolonged applause from the guests (of admiration from those connected with the young lady player, of relief from all unconcerned in her) marking its conclusion,—six other young ladies rise from their seats, advance to the front of the platform, and sing a piece of music, in a tone both squeaky and nasal; at certain intervals, elevating their eyes, and lifting their hands—alternately the right and left—in a style imagined to be indicative of feeling, animation, and appropriate action.

At the end of the vocal piece, Monsignore is again seized with a fit of coughing. The box of comfits is once more offered; but this time, the Abbess's courtesy is declined by a gesture of the white and jewelled hand of the polite ecclesiastic, who has an eye to the coming collation, and thinks it as well not to injure his appetite with the cloy of sweets.

Then four young ladies stood up in a row, and engaged in a French recitation.

Then came the bestowal of the prizes. Those happy selected young ladies destined to receive them, came and stood before the throne of Monsignore, who addressed a short speech, in a mild snuffle of mingled admonition and encouragement, to each.

A cold collation succeeded; fruit, cakes, and wine, for the visitors. A banquet of all that could be collected of rarest and most exquisite in both eating and drinking, for Monsignore and his train.

Several successive vacations,—with their prize-distributions, their pincushions, their recitation-gabbles, their chorus-squeaks, their tinsel-crowns, their paper rose-wreaths,—had followed each

other as the years came round. But the end of that time found the young ladies of the school little changed. They had grown up, indeed, from quite little children, into tall girls of from fifteen, to seventeen, or eighteen,—some even older: but in heart, —in all matters of principle or sentiment—they were veriest babies still. Some of the most energetic among them had gained a smattering of grammar, a notion or two of geography, (about as much, perhaps, as to know that their native Italy was pink, and shaped like a boot; that France was blue, Portugal green, Spain yellow, and the British Islands a smoky brown), could write flourished alphabets in three or four different texts, and add up sums the whole length of a slate;—but these were looked upon as the prodigies of the school—quite geniuses; girls almost unfemininely clever. One of these, Elvira Blangini, professed a school-girl's fondness for Bianca, and had obtained her father's consent that she should spend the ensuing holiday with her, at her guardian's country house. "I wish the holidays were come," said Elvira, "what an endless time it does seem to wait."

"Don't you like school?" said Bianca.

"Like school!" exclaimed Elvira; "Why, of course not; who does? stupid teaching, and humdrum learning, and dull lessons, and all that,—instead of doing as one likes all day, and idling away as much as one pleases, sauntering in the garden, and so forth, as one can do at home. Besides, Hortensio says I'm too old for school, now; and so I am. I shall be nineteen next birthday."

"I didn't know you had a brother;" said Bianca.

"I haven't;" said Elvira.

"Then who's Hortensio? I thought, perhaps, he was your brother."

"My brother? La, no! He's—he's—a—a—friend; a neighbour of ours. I quite long to show him to you! What an endless time it does seem to wait."

In spite of the endless-seeming time, it came to an end at last; and Elvira Blangini obtained her wish of having her friend Bianca Minola to spend the holidays with her. She also very soon had her other wish fulfilled, of showing Hor-

tensio. For not long after the two girls had arrived, and were still in all the delight of unpacking their school-boxes, Elvira exclaimed in a sort of breathless excitement:—"Come here, come here, Bianca, to this window! stand behind this curtain with me, and peep out, and you'll see him. There! Look! Walking in the next garden, with a mandolin in his hand. It's he, himself!"

"Who?" said Bianca.

"Who, child? Why, Hortensio, to be sure! Dear fellow, there he is! He little thinks who's looking at him. But come, Bianca, get a fan—I have mine—and we'll go down into the garden and see him. He'll be so astonished to find I'm come home. Why, how you blush! What a bashful thing you are!"

"Am I?" said Bianca.

When they reached the summer-house, Elvira gave Bianca a bit of fancy-work, to hold in her hands, and took up some herself; but presently tossed it aside, snatched up a guitar and struck a few chords.

Presently, a voice was heard, saying:—"I did not know you were returned home, signorina; may I come over?" and, in another instant, Hortensio leaped the low wall, and came forward to the summer-house.

Elvira Blangini presented him to her young school-friend, on seeing whom, the young man, at first, looked much embarrassed; but what with the absence of all embarrassment on the part of the young hostess herself, and what with the extreme shyness of her friend Bianca, he soon gained courage; and made himself quite agreeable—ending by offering to play either the guitar or the mandolin to them as they worked.

"No, perhaps best not;" said Elvira, giving a peculiar look in the direction of the house; "you may read to us, if you like—here's Ariosto."

"La, do you read poetry, Elvira?" said Bianca; "I thought it was forbidden."

"Oh, ay, at the convent, child; it's all very well there; but here I read what I like. We're school-girls there; we're women here, my dear;" said Elvira.

"And very charming women, too;" replied Hortensio, with a gallant bow and glance. The words, the bow, and the glance, caused her such a hot rush of confusion, as Bianca had never before experienced.

Elvira suddenly put her finger on her lip—listened—then pointed stealthily in the direction whence Hortensio had come. The gesture was so significant, and so instantaneously obeyed by the young gentleman's sudden retirement over the wall, that Bianca could not help seeing it must have been a signal in frequent use between them on former occasions of the like kind.

The next moment, Elvira's guardian appeared in one of the garden-walks, approaching them; and his ward, with the detestable firmness of habitual deceit, said: "I'm glad you're come, guardy; I want to consult you about the dance you have promised me to give my schoolfellows. When shall it be?"

"Whenever it best pleases yourself to appoint, my charming Elvira;" said the gallant guardian, raising his ward's hand to his lips; "only whenever the time fixed, remember that I claim this fair hand for the first dance."

"We'll see about that, guardy;" said Elvira, coquettishly withdrawing her hand, and giving him a pat on the back of his; "you know I don't approve of such ways."

The party assembled at the ball was a very large one. There were all Elvira's and Bianca's favourite schoolfellows, as well as a goodly company of neighbours and acquaintances. Among the latter, was a madame Ciarla,—known to all Padua as an inveterate gossip, though a good-natured woman.

On her first arrival, she found herself near Bianca, who had just advanced to receive her sister Katharina.

"Well, young ladies, I'm delighted to see you once again; and so grown and improved, I declare! You are both very handsome girls; as you'll soon be told by all the young gallants. There is signior Gremio, who has lost his old father, by-the-by, at last, and is on the look-out for a pretty young wife, to help him spend his large inheritance. And then there is young signior Giulio, who's grown quite a tall hand-

some young man; notwithstanding that terrible fall he had, when a boy."

"Best not speak of him; my sister dislikes him; it only irritates her to mention his name;" said Bianca.

Her sister gave her a strange look, and seemed about to speak; but she checked herself, bit her lips, and forced herself to listen to madame Ciarla's endless gossip.

At this moment, Hortensio made his way up to Bianca, saying:—"There is such a crowd, I have only just been able to reach you, signorina. Pity my Tantalus torture; I have been watching you from a distance without being able to get near enough to beseech your hand for the dance." He seized it, and hurried her among the dancers.

"Look at my friend Elvira, yonder; how exquisitely beautiful she looks, does she not?" said Bianca to Hortensio.

"It strikes me she looks a little sulky, at this moment;" he replied, laughingly.

"Ah! can you wonder, with that ugly old man for her partner?" said Bianca, casting a moment's glance at her own young dashing one, then casting her eyes down upon her spread fan.

"Is she not passing lovely? Did you ever see more brilliant carnation on a cheek?" persisted Bianca.

"The flowers match the cheeks precisely, it must be owned;" replied he.

"Fie, saucy critic that you are!" said Bianca. "See, Elvira has finished her dance, and is coming this way; go and make atonement by engaging her for the next, or I'll never forgive you."

"On that condition, I obey your mandate;" said Hortensio, as he bowed, and quitted her.

"I've performed my duty-dance, now for my pleasure-dance;" said Elvira, holding out her hand to Hortensio, as he approached. "Who have you been dancing with? Oh, I see; my school friend, Bianca Minola. A dear little innocent milk-and-water thing, isn't she? Talks bread-and-butter,—lisps white-of-egg; but she's a darling creature, for all her insipidity. But see here, what I have received! An invitation

for signior Gremio's grand party, next week. Mind you get one, also. The entertainment will be none to me, unless you're there; so, be sure and come."

"How can I fail, with such flattering inducement?" said he.

Signior Gremio's party was to be of the most attractive description. The company were to assemble in the beautiful grounds of his estate, and spend the day in one round of pleasant out-door amusement. There were dancing, ball-playing, battledore and shuttlecock, archery, and all kinds of active sports; and there were shady seats, and turf banks, and tents for those who preferred entire repose.

There was a large group dispersed round the grassy bank on which Katharina, Bianca, and her friend Elvira, had seated themselves. The gentlemen lounged at the ladies' feet, or leaned against the surrounding trees; while gay jests, and repartees, were bandied to and fro.

Suddenly signior Gremio said, "I expect Giulio Vinci here to-day; he's not long returned from Naples, where he has been spending some time with an uncle of his."

Katharina's face flashed scarlet.

"And who may Giulio Vinci be?" said Elvira.

"A young friend of mine, for whom I've a great value. I rejoice that he is returned home time enough for my entertainment;" said Gremio. "Tho' he must leave us early, to join his ship."

"He's the boy I told you of, whom my sister was so unfortunate as to injure;" said Bianca in Elvira's ear; pressing her friend's arm, to draw her attention to Katharina's change of colour.

Katharina overheard the words, and said loudly and passionately:—"If ever you speak of that again, I'll make your meek blue eyes as red as a ferret's, with my nails."

There was an awkward pause. The company exchanged significant looks, at this evidence of Katharina Minola's unabated violence, and then, by degrees they broke up into little separate parties, and strolled away.

Presently, signior Gremio proposed adjourning to the lawn, where the dancing and ball-playing were going on. He offered

his arm to the two sisters to conduct them thither, saying:—"I'll find you a partner, miss Katharina; as for miss Bianca, I hope she will favour me by becoming mine."

"Never mind me; I shan't dance;" said Katharina; and when her companions had left her, she stood lost in thought, with her eyes fixed upon a certain tree, that she well remembered.

Presently, a good-humoured laugh reached her ear, and she heard a voice say:—"She's here, is she? Object to meet her? To be sure not; why should I?"

"How contemptuously he speaks!" was her hurried thought.

Then, accompanied by signior Gremio, Bianca, and others, Giulio Vinci came towards her; on her turning round towards him, he merely made her a passing bow, and turned to speak to some one else.

Soon after, a game of ball was formed; and it proceeded with great spirit.

Giulio Vinci had just made a long run after the ball, and was tossing it up into the sky as high as he possibly could, and catching it, while he returned to the spot whence he was to pitch it into Bianca's hand.

As she caught it from him, she said:—"How active you are, signior Giulio! what a mercy it is, that you've no lameness—no weakness remaining from your accident!"

The words were hardly out of her mouth, before Katharina snatched the ball from her sister's hands, and flung it over the wall. "I warned you not to allude to that again!" she exclaimed.

"Hey-dey, miss Miscetta! Are these your tricks still?" exclaimed Giulio, turning suddenly towards her. Then, seizing her by the wrists, he cried out:—"Run, some of you, and fetch the ball. I'll hold this little fury fast, till you return." She writhed, and struggled; but not one jot could she move her wrists in his firm grasp. He laughed at her fruitless efforts to free herself, and said:—"You had to deal with a boy, then; I'm a man now, Miscetta, and stronger than you are."

The ball was brought back; and the game was resumed; but the instant it became Bianca's turn to throw the ball,

Katharina seized it from her, and threw it over the wall as before.

She had no sooner done so, than Giulio caught her up in his arms, and ran with her to a tree, near to which lay a cord that had been used for one of the swings. With this he proceeded to bind her to the tree, in spite of her frenzied struggling; while the company, half laughing, half concerned, looked on, expecting to hear her flame out with her usual violence.

But not a single word did she utter.

For while Giulio was binding her to the tree, she suddenly became aware that it was the same from which her own violence had caused his fall, years before; in his exertions to secure her, the hair became pushed back from his forehead, and she caught sight of the deep-seamed scar that marked the place of the wound her hand had once given him.

A quite new and strange set of emotions overwhelmed her, at finding herself completely overcome,—*mastered.* One of the most singular features of this new state of feeling is, that the sense of defeat, for the first time in her life, is not altogether painful. As her woman's frame involuntarily yields to his masculine strength—there is an inexplicable acquiescence, altogether unwonted, and surprising to herself.

Her silence, her turning pale, made Giulio, in his turn, relent. "Say you'll not meddle with the ball again, and I'll undo the cords;" he said.

She looked into his face; but was literally unable to speak.

Taking her non-reply for stubbornness, he turned on his heel, saying:—"When you're tired of your bonds, you can cast them off by a word. Call to me,—promise to let the ball alone, and I'll come and release you."

When he returned to the ball-players, he found several gentlemen standing round Bianca, engaged in bewailing the scratches which her sister's rough seizure of the ball from her hands had inflicted; she, with pretty shrinkings, now winding her handkerchief about them, and now unwrapping and showing the scarce perceptible red marks, which made the little dainty trembling hands look only the whiter—a fact of which she was of course unconscious.

"Let me give you my arm to the pavillion, signorina Bianca;" said signior Gremio; "a little iced water with wine in it will restore you."

"A glass of water, then; for I own I feel a little faint;—perhaps, with the loss of blood. But a glass of water merely—no wine—I never touch it—I couldn't think of such a thing."

The sympathetic train of gentlemen attended her to the pavillion; and Giulio was following the crowd; but he turned back, went to the tree where he had left Katharina bound, and unfastened the cords. When he had released her, he drew her arm within his, and led her to the pavillion with the rest. There was something in this silent attention on his part—in the quiet decision of his manner, that was strangely pleasant to Katharina, who walked unresistingly by his side.

Then Giulio took leave of his friend signior Gremio, saying it was high time he should be on his journey. He addressed a few farewell words to some among the company that were known to him; and at length came up to Katharina.

"Come;" said he to her; "let you and me part friends, for all that's past and gone between us. Shake hands with me—to show you bear no malice."

She stood up, trembling violently, but made no answer; and kept her eyes fixed on the floor,—her face, neck, and arms, one glow of crimson.

"Thou'rt a strange creature;" he said. "But come, it may be for the last time; shake hands."

She seemed immovable.

"If you won't, you won't; I can't help it, Miscetta."

At that word, as if stung, she exclaimed,—lifting her eyes, and flashing them upon him,—"I hate you!"

"I know you do; you've proved that long ago;" he said, laughing; "but I owe you no grudge. Farewell!"

He turned away to the rest. Stationed them at the window from which they could see him at the last visible point on the road he was about to take. "And then, when I turn, and wave my hat, do you all give me three loud cheers."

He dashed out of the room, exclaiming "Good-bye, all!" And then there was a huddling round the window, and little

exclamations of "I see him! Where? O yes, there! Now he's going out of the gate—now he's going along the road—now he's reached the point. I see! he turns, and waves his hat! Huzza! Huzza! Huzza!"

As the echo of the last cheer rang through the pavillion, and died away in the distance, a deep sob was heard.

The party of young people started, and turned round. Bianca pointed stealthily to the seat on which Katharina lay at full length, with her face buried in her arms.

Elvira only shrugged her shoulders, and went away with Bianca, softly tittering and whispering together; followed by their train of gentleman-admirers.

Not a week after the entertainment at signior Gremio's, Katharina took a rambling walk down the road that skirted his estate. On one side of this road there was a sort of dry ditch, that sloped upwards with a low green bank, surmounted by a hedge, which enclosed the extensive grounds belonging to him.

By some impulse,—unacknowledged to herself,—Katharina climbed up this bank, and crept into the hedge, holding by a young olive-tree which grew there, while she looked earnestly into the enclosure. She soon distinguished the tree which grew upon the lawn; and kept her eyes fixed upon it, her thoughts recalling the scenes with which it was associated. Again she saw the laughing boy seated there, idly cracking nuts, and carelessly swinging his legs;—the rustle among the boughs,—the fall—the bleeding temple—the insensible form, borne away apparently lifeless. "I owe you no grudge—I owe you no grudge," her lips murmured.

Then she beheld the struggle, when he bound her there, to its trunk. She felt the clasping masterful arms bending her to a half-reluctant, half-pleased yielding. And again she murmured:—"I owe you no grudge—Farewell!"

At that instant, voices approach along the road. Katharina shrinks closely within her leafy covert, holding fast by the olive sapling. The voices come nearer; and one of them,—that of madame Ciarla,—says:—"Yes, indeed, a frightful piece of news! So young! so full of life and hope! Just as he joined his ship, while he stretched forth his hand to seize the rope by

which he was to scramble up her side to the gangway, the boat beneath him gave a lurch, and the poor young fellow fell overboard, and was drowned."

"It's a shocking thing indeed, though I don't know the young man;" said the other voice; "What did you say his name was?"

"Giulio Vinci.—Bless me! what was that? A groan?"

The speakers stop, and listen. "No; nothing." The voices die away; and Katharina dropped from the bank into the grass-grown channel at its foot. She lay there some time, as if stunned. At length she returned home; but she was still frightfully pale; which attracted her father's attention, and caused him to reproach her for being so perverse as to go out in the sun, during the heat of the day.

Katharina flung out of the room—rushed up to her own chamber—locked the door—threw herself on the bed,—and wept long and bitterly.

The intimacy between Bianca Minola and Elvira Blangini, continued as strongly as ever.

In secret, however, the hollowness of their affection grew and grew, until scarcely more than the mere empty husk of their sworn bosom-friendship was left. It was like the rind of a pear, eaten out by wasps and earwigs; all the pulp and sweetness sucked forth, while the worthless outside remained—a mere show and semblance of the fruit it once was.

Elvira's whole stock of vanity—and it was by no means small—could no longer blind her to the fact that she had ceased to be the sole object of Hortensio's attentions.

She determined to bring to a decided avowal the long-hinted sentiments of her guardian; doubting not that, when her younger lover should be threatened with the chance of losing her, he would be frightened into a summary declaration of his own passion.

With so unscrupulous a coquetry as hers, it may be supposed that she was not long in effecting her purpose, so far as her elder prey was concerned. The amorous old gentleman, caught eagerly at the bait held out to him, and made his proposal in form.

She, with well-affected modesty, required a few hours to con-

sider of his proposal; and then, was not long in contriving to summon Hortensio to her side.

In the conversation that ensued, she found, to her dismay, that she had entirely miscalculated the aim of his affections. He plainly told her they were fixed on her friend Bianca.

Her pride enabled her to conceal her disappointment, and she found consolation in the thought that she could, by an immediate acceptance of her guardian's offer of marriage, proclaim her indifference to the treachery of her lover and her friend; and by the wealth and importance it would secure, have the means of triumphing over them.

The marriage was,—in deference to the bridegroom's impatience,—to take place in a few days. And immediately after the ceremony, the new-married couple left Padua for a beautiful villa, a few miles out of town.

A week after the wedding, madame Ciarla paid a visit to the Minolas, full of news she had just received. It was no other than that on the previous day, Elvira's husband had been seized with a fit of apoplexy, which had put an end to his life.

"Shocking, isn't it? Not a week married, and already a widow! So young too, poor thing!" said madame Ciarla in conclusion.

"How interesting she'll look in her widow's weeds, poor darling thing!" remarked Bianca.

"Ah! you deserve to be a beauty yourself, as you are, my dear miss Bianca;" said the old lady, who was more good-natured than deep-sighted. "You are never backward in praising the beauty of others."

"I hope I know my duty better than to be envious, or anything that is wrong and wicked;" said Bianca.

"Dear young lady! you are famed far and wide for your mild behaviour, your beauty and your modesty. Well would it be if your sister would take pattern by you."

"O, but she dislikes taking pattern—and she says she hates model people. Poor dear Katharina!" sighed Bianca. "She disdains to imitate excellence. She does not wish to be good. She has not the least virtuous emulation. Poor dear Kate!"

Time went on. The young widow remained in wealthy se-

clusion at her villa. Bianca's character for sweetness, and artless modesty increased; while Katharina,—her temper irritable and morose, her words insolent,—gained the reputation of being a confirmed shrew. Her father, Baptista Minola, tired out with her conduct,—yet forgetting how much of its cause might be traced to his own habit of reproach—found himself perpetually longing to get rid of her presence, by her marriage with some one who would remove her out of his way, out of his house.

About this time he learned the views of signior Gremio and signior Hortensio, with regard to his youngest daughter, Bianca. But he informed them, that until his eldest was disposed of in marriage, he could not think of parting with her sister; adding, that either of them were welcome to take Katharina. This intimation,—as might be expected from its unfatherly want of delicacy,—was received with open disrespect by the two gentlemen. Their proposals, Baptista Minola's reply, and the rejoinder, happened to be made in both the daughters' presence; and, enraged to hear herself thus treated, Katharina turned sharply to her father, saying:—

> "*I pray you, sir, is it your will*
> *To make a stale of me among these mates?*"

The conversation going on angrily, Bianca says first to Katharina, then to her father:—

> "*Sister, content you in my discontent.*
> *Sir, to your pleasure humbly I subscribe:*
> *My books and instruments shall be my company;*
> *On them to look, and practise by myself.*"
>
> TAMING OF THE SHREW, Act i. sc. i.

TALE VIII.

OPHELIA; THE ROSE OF ELSINORE.

THE babe lay on the nurse's knee. Could any impression have been received through those wide-stretched eyes, that stared as wonderingly as if they were in fact beholding amazed the new existence upon which they had so lately opened, the child would have seen that it lay in a spacious apartment, furnished with all the tokens of wealth and magnificence, which those ruder ages could command. Those wide-stretched violet eyes, might have noted that a tall figure, of graceful mien, frequently came to bend over, and breathe mother's blessings upon the little baby head; and that another figure, kindly and fond, would come to look upon the little daughter lately vouchsafed to him; and that still another, a young boy, would advance on tiptoe to peep at, and touch very carefully, the strange baby sister. Of the broad good-humoured face that more constantly hung over it, the wide-stretched violet eyes probably gained clearer perception; for they learned to look eagerly for the good peasant-woman, who had been engaged as wet-nurse to the little Ophelia,—daughter of the lord Polonius, and of the lady Aoudra.

Ophelia was yet a little toddling thing, when her father, the lord Polonius, received an appointment as embassador in Paris, and was compelled to quit the Danish court for an uncertain period.

So distinguished an honour, was matter of high self-gratulation to the ambitious courtier; and he determined that his wife should accompany him, remarking that a court without a queen,

an embassy without an embassadress, were shorn of half their splendour and influence; therefore, the lady Aoudra prepared to obey by making arrangements for the suitable placing of her children during their parents' absence. For Laertes, the boy, there was the protection of his uncle. For the little Ophelia, her mother determined she should be confided to the care of her former nurse, Botilda.

The lady Aoudra determined to place her child herself in the arms of its foster-mother; and all that she saw at the cottage of Botilda confirmed her in the conviction, that its advantages would outweigh its disadvantages. It was a clean wholesome place; its inhabitants were homely but kindly; and the lady Aoudra felt that her child would be healthfully and affectionately tended. She found, too, that the little Ophelia's chief companion would be Jutha, the only daughter of the peasant couple—a young girl of some fifteen or sixteen years of age, of the most winning appearance. To Jutha then, she especially recommended the care and tendance of her babe,—laid it in the rude wooden cot, and took a weeping farewell of her treasure.

For some hours after her mother had left her, the unconscious Ophelia slumbered on. When Sigurd and his two eldest sons, Harald and Ivar, came in from their daily labour, at eventide, they went and peeped at the little stranger who had become their inmate. Botilda showed her husband the purse of money the lady Aoudra had given them to take charge of her child; and told him that the lady wished them to increase their own comforts at the same time; and that in consequence, she, Botilda, had provided an extra supper for them, to make a sort of feast in celebration of her own little lady-babe's coming among them.

Meantime the infant Ophelia continued to sleep on. But as one of the good-humoured peasant lads happened to forget himself, and give a loud laugh, the sound disturbed her; she turned, and opened her eyes, and lay awake.

"Let her be a bit!" said Sigurd, laying his hand on his wife's arm; "and let's see what she'll do; she don't seem a bit scared like, at all us new faces."

On the contrary, the child seemed entertained; and continued to look from one to another, patting her hand on the edge of the cot, and humming a little song to herself; they all watching her the while with quiet, amused glances.

By and bye, she drew a long breath, looked round, and said:—"Mamma!"

Botilda and Jutha both now went towards her; doing their best to distract her attention from the thought which had at length evidently struck her. With the facile spirits of childhood, this was no difficult task. She was brought over to the table to take her first rustic meal of bread and milk, which she did with much relish,—despite the absence of the gold service which had hitherto administered her refection,—and with much apparent contentment, leaning against the familiar bosom of her nurse, frolicking and making acquaintance with the smiling beauty of Jutha, and graciously allowing the burly peasant Sigurd to curl her miniature hands round his great big horny forefinger. In short, the little lady-babe seemed at once to take to her foster-family, and to make herself at home with them.

After this inaugural meal, however, Jutha contrived to secure the exclusive care of the child from that time forth. She dedicated herself entirely to its comfort and happiness, and made it in return her own joy and delight.

On the morning after Ophelia's arrival at the cottage, she was sitting on the young girl's knee, in that half drowsy state of quiet which is apt to succeed a violent game of romps. She lay back to enjoy complete rest, while her eyes fell dreamily upon a figure on the other side the room. It was that of a hairy loutish boy. He was crouching in a recess in the wall opposite, killing flies. As the insects buzzed and flitted to and fro, he eyed them from beneath his shaggy brows, with snorting eagerness, and tongue out-lolling; ever and anon taking aim with his hairy paw, and at each successful dab that sent a crushed and mangled fly to swell the heap which already lay there, the lout gave a grin. Sometimes he would chop among the mound of dead with a knife that lay beside him; sometimes he would seize one of the living ones by the wing, or the

leg, and hold it between finger and thumb, watching its buzzing struggles, and grinning at its futile flutterings; then let it go again, to pounce upon, and deal it its death-blow. The child lay looking at him in a sort of bewitched inability to remove her eyes from an object that filled her with uneasy wonder; while Jutha, accustomed to the uncouth cruelty of her idiot brother, Ulf, had not perceived that the child's attention was fixed upon him. Presently, Botilda's voice sounded from an inner room, desiring Jutha to come and help her with some household matter that she had in hand. Jutha placed the little Ophelia softly on the floor, put some playthings near her, and bade her sit still for a few minutes till she came back. The child sat, with her eyes unmoved from the fly-killer. Presently he turned, and spied her. He gave one of his silent grins.

"Are you one of the Elle folk?" he said.

No answer.

"Or the Trolls?" asked he again.

No answer.

"You're little enough; and pretty enough. But I remember, you're the little court-lady." He continued to stare down upon her, grinning; as she kept her eyes fixed upon him. "Come to the bear!" he exclaimed presently, in his discordant tones; "come here, and shake hands with me."

No answer, but a shake of the head; as she eyed the huge paw held out to her. "Come to the bear, I tell ye!" growled he. "I shan't eat ye. Only hug ye. Come to the bear!"

"No!"—desperately; with a more vehement shake of the head.

"What if I threw this at ye, and knocked off your legs like one of them?" said he, pointing with his knife to the heap of dead and dying flies stripped of their legs and wings.

Ophelia gave a startled scream.

In ran Jutha and her mother.

"Little court-lady's proud; and won't shake hands with Ulf, the bear;" he said, lolling out his tongue, and grinning.

"You limb!" said his mother, shaking her fist at him; "mind my words. You dare to frighten my baby; and it'll be

the worse for you. She's the great lord Polonius's child, sent here to be taken care of—not to be harmed or frighted."

"I didn't want to hurt her; I wanted to hug her—and she wouldn't let me."

"Don't touch her at all, Ulf dear," said his sister Jutha. "She don't know that our bear's hugs are harmless. She don't know you're called in sport, Ulf, the bear. Let her get used to you, before you try to make friends with her. She got used to me, before she'd come to me from mother, you know, last night."

"You always make me do what you will, Jutha;" grunted Ulf. "But I don't mind pleasing you; you please me, and give the bear things he likes, sweet food—good eating."

Sigurd's cottage was situated in a pleasant spot. It overlooked a green valley, embosomed in swelling hills; and towards the north-east it was screened by a thick and lofty forest of primæval trees. Jutha took care that her charge should enjoy as much of the open air as possible. They would go forth at quite early morning, and with some food in Jutha's basket, would ramble abroad all day long. Sometimes they made exploring expeditions among the hills; sometimes, as far as the sea-shore; where they would pick up shells, as they strayed along the smooth sand; or watch the billows come tumbling in, crested with foam, rolling over one another in huge monstrous frolic—like lion-whelps at play. These rambles abroad with Jutha were the pleasantest periods of the little Ophelia's sojourn among her foster-family; when she was at the cottage itself, she felt herself strange and apart. After the first curiosity excited by the vision of the little lady among them, Sigurd and his two elder sons, Harold and Ivar, took little notice of her, beyond a passing nod, or a good-humoured grin. They rose and were off to work by daybreak; returning to the cottage only in time for the supper, which immediately preceded their retiring to rest.

Botilda was ever occupied with household drudgery, in which she frequently enlisted the services of Jutha; so that the child was thus thrown entirely upon her own resources; and these were few or none for procuring entertainment. She would, for

the most part, sit still, watching Ulf, the idiot boy, with a sort of helpless, fascinated attention. It was with a kind of dismayed interest, that she would sit, perfectly still and motionless, to watch the ugly, odious Ulf. Once, he was squatting near the hearth, with a huge foot clasped in each of his large hairy hands, his chin resting between his knees, his leering blood-shot eyes staring greedily towards a string of small birds, which were dangling to roast, by the wood embers.

"Have some?" said he abruptly, turning to the child; "they'll soon be done."

The little Ophelia shook her head.

"But they're nice, I can tell ye. They're nice to sing—but they're nicer to eat." And he smacked his great broad lips, that were drawn wide from ear to ear.

Ophelia shuddered.

"Hark how they frizzle!" said he; and his large flapping ears moved as he spoke. "Sniff, how savoury they smell!" And the black bristly nostrils gaped and expanded, while the blood rushed into his face, as was its wont, when he felt pleasure.

Presently, he clutched the roast in his fist, and exclaiming:—"They're done! they're done!" held it out towards the little girl, repeating, "Have some? you'd better!" while his eyes gloated beneath his shaggy brows, at her, and at the viands.

"Isn't it too hot for you to hold?" asked the little Ophelia, as if she couldn't help putting the question—from wonder to see him grasp the burning food.

"Ha, ha! the bear's paw is too tough to be scalded; and I like my victuals hot;" said Ulf, thrusting one of the birds into his mouth, whole, crunching it through, bones and all, and then bolting it, at one gulp.

As the child listened to the noise he made, his fangs champing into the bones and mangled flesh, and looked at the savage greed with which he crammed, she thought he seemed some wild beast, ravening his prey.

More than ever she shrinks from his approaches; and yet he expresses liking for her, not enmity. Dread and disgust she feels; but withal a strange irresistible excitement, which impels her to look upon that she fears and loathes.

However, this is only when bad weather keeps her in-doors. When the sky is clear, and neither snow falls, nor winds howl, nor mists hover, nor rain-showers threaten, the little Ophelia coaxes Jutha abroad; and again they sally forth together for a long ramble through forest, field, or valley; among the rocks, or along the sea-shore.

And then the young girl amuses the child with telling her quaint tales, and singing her old ballads, such as she has heard from her mother.

One fine noonday, when the heat of the sun had compelled Jutha and the little girl to seek the shade of the forest depths, Ophelia interrupted the story then telling, by exclaiming suddenly:—"Look Jutha! See there!"

Jutha looked in the direction of the child's pointing finger, and saw, to her surprise, a milk-white horse, saddled and bridled, coming leisurely along beneath the trees, cropping the grass, and looking as if he had strayed from his fastenings. "The beautiful creature!" exclaimed Jutha. "What costly housings it has! It looks like a fairy horse,—the steed of some of those gallant princes in the stories! And it is gentle, too; see how it lets me lay my hand upon its bridle, and pat its neck. It is well trained, and belongs to some noble master, doubtless. But who can he be? And where?"

The young girl held the rein, and looked about her in perplexity; while the white horse tossed its arching neck, nearly jerking the curb from her hand, pawed the ground, and neighed shrill and loud.

"Look, Jutha!" once more exclaimed the child. "There among the trees—on that mossy slope—do you see?"

"He is sleeping!" said Jutha, in hushed answer; "and soundly too; not even the neighing of his good horse can disturb him."

The girl and the child crept a little nearer to the figure they saw lying there. It was that of a man, in a rich hunting-dress. His plumed hat had been placed so as to shade his eyes during sleep; but it had fallen partly aside, and showed a face finely shaped, with features marked and handsome.

"A fit owner for such a gallant beast!" murmured Jutha, as

she turned to pat once again the neck of the steed; for the docile creature had suffered the young girl to retain his rein, and to draw him after her to the spot where his master lay. "Sure, a prince—no less; such a prince as they tell of in the wondrous tales I have heard. How passing beautiful he is! What can he be? Where can he have come from? From fairy-land—or from the court, surely."

The sleeper opened his eyes, and beheld the two young girls standing there, with his courser's bridle-rein in the elder's hand.

"I have brought you your horse, sir;" said she, dropping her simple curtsey. "He was straying."

"And a fairer damsel to bring errant-knight his palfrey could not be found in all the realm of enchantment;" said the stranger, springing to his feet, and receiving the bridle from her; "surely I have wandered upon charmed ground, and you are one of its denizens."

"A plain country-maiden, none other, sir; and this her mother's nurse-charge;" said Jutha, curtseying once again, and presenting the little Ophelia.

"Still a charmer;—an earthly charmer, if you will—yet no less bewitching;" said the handsome stranger. "Pr'ythee tell me thy name, pretty one, and I will tell thee mine. It is Eric."

"And mine is Jutha, sir, at your service."

"Truly, thou seem'st an opening rose, Jutha, and yonder quiet little thing a close-furled bud, that promises to be just such another flower of beauty as thyself. In good faith, I may thank my lady Fortune, who brought me wearied from the chase to cast myself down in an enchanted wood, that I might dream a waking dream such as this."

A mounted horseman now rode up, and addressing the stranger in a tone of respect, announced that the chase was concluded; adding that his majesty had noticed the lord Eric's absence, and had desired some one to collect stragglers as the royal party was now returning.

"'Tis well, Trasco; ride thou on; I will speedily overtake thee, and attend his majesty;" said lord Eric. Then vaulting

into the saddle, he raised his hat, kissed his hand, and saying "I must obey the king's command now, but I shall find a time to see more of my wood-nymphs," gave the spur to his horse, and was gone.

There was an end of the story-telling for that day. Jutha could talk of nothing else but of the noble stranger, of his handsome face and figure, of his milk-white steed, of his unexpected appearance, and of his speedy departure. The encounter in the wood was never mentioned at the cottage by either Jutha or Ophelia. The young girl seemed satisfied with the interest it awakened in herself; and the child was of a quiet, retiring nature, which seldom induced her to communicate much with those around her.

For some reason best known to herself, Jutha now invariably took the way towards the wood. Their former walks among the rocks, or along the sea-shore, were all abandoned in favour of the path which led through the forest; and the little Ophelia, loving the mysterious grandeur of its high-arching trees, was well-pleased it should be their constant resort. One morning they had strolled far into its woody recesses, Jutha, as usual, entertaining her young companion with tales and marvels; but her attention seemed elsewhere; and her look thoughtful and vexed.

Suddenly, it brightened; and Ophelia, following the direction of her eyes, saw, coming towards them, the figure of lord Eric, on his milk-white horse. He threw himself from the saddle, and eagerly approached. He seemed overjoyed to meet his nymphs of the wood, and sauntered along by their side, leading his horse by the bridle; talking and laughing animatedly. He shared their grassy seat, when they stopped to rest from the noontide heat; he shared the contents of their basket, when they produced their noontide meal, declaring he had never tasted daintier fare; he gave himself up to the spirit of the forest ramble, as though he could wish no pleasanter enjoyment. Morning after morning, he returned to make one in the wood-party; and never had the hours seemed to fly by so lightly. Certainly, Jutha found it so; for the shadows of evening would steal upon them, with warning to return home,

ere she could well believe it to be afternoon. The little Ophelia was less charmed with this addition to their society. She had hitherto been accustomed to have her friend Jutha supply her with never-failing store of amusement from her own talk; it was otherwise, since this stranger had intruded upon their pleasant wood rambles. Jutha had now no look, no word but for him. But then, she herself seemed so contented, that her child-friend could not altogether find in her heart to regret what made Jutha so evidently, so radiantly happy. She had never seen her look so full of joy, so full of spirit. Her eye sparkled; her colour rose, her voice had exultation in its tone, as she took her way, with Ophelia, to these rambles in the wood—where they were sure to be joined by their new acquaintance.

But after a time, Jutha's look of joy faded; her spirits, that at first seemed almost too exuberant, varied frequently; the air of inward ecstasy was exchanged for an appearance of anxiety and uneasiness. She would still, in her cheerful moments, break out into snatches of the song which was her favourite at this time:—'For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy;' but there was forced mirth in the tone of exultation.

The altered manner of the young girl escaped the notice of the cottage inmates; but the child observed the change in her friend; and sorrowed wonderingly.

Time goes on; and the young girl's dejection increases. Ophelia finds her one evening, sitting by the rivulet, wringing her hands, and sobbing. The child soothes her fondly, asking what grieves her.

Jutha only shook her head, trying to stifle a sob that would be heard.

"Come, let us return home; and I'll tell you a story by the way."

"I shall like that; it is long since I have heard one of your stories, Jutha. I shall love to hear one again."

"How the wind howls! What a dreary autumn evening it is!" said Jutha, looking round her at the darkening sky. "See how the leaves whirl, and fall! The trees will all be bare soon; and then comes winter—cold, cold, winter. No more forest

walks, when the trees are bare! 'They bore him bare-faced on the bier,'——That's not the song I am thinking of;" she muttered.

"You think of sad songs now, Jutha;" said the child. "Where are your merry ones?"

"Where indeed? Gone! All gone! 'He is gone, he is gone, and we cast away moan.' Ay, that is it!" And she began to chaunt in a mournful voice:—

'And will he not come again?
And will he not come again?
No, no, he is dead,
Go to thy death-bed,
He never will come again.'"

"Who is dead, Jutha? You frighten me;" said the child.

"No one is dead;" said the young girl, quickly. "Who said he was dead? They say dead and gone; but we may be gone, without being dead, mayn't we, little one?" She spoke in a sharp, abrupt tone, as if she would fain have made it sound jestingly. Then she hurried on:—"Do you hear the owl hoot? See, yonder she flies, with her flappy wings, and mealy feathers. I'll tell you a story about Dame Owl. I promised you a story, you know. Listen."

"I am listening, Jutha."

The young girl told her the legend as she had heard it. She told her that when He who had pity in his heart for the veriest wretch that crawls—for the dying thief—for the erring sinner—even for her whose sins were many;—when He who taught divine pity and charity above all things, walked the earth in human shape, and suffered human privation in the plenitude of His merciful sympathy with poor humanity, it once upon a time befell, that He hungered by the way, and seeing a shop where bread was baking, entered beneath the roof, and asked for some to eat. The mistress of the shop was about to put a piece of dough into the oven to bake; but her daughter, pitiless of heart, declaring that the piece was too large, reduced it to a mere morsel. This was no sooner done, than the dough began to swell and increase, until, in amaze at its miraculously

growing size, the baker's daughter screamed out, like an owlet, 'Whoohoo—hoo—hoo!' Then He who had craved food, held forth his hand; and, in the place where she who lacked charity had stood screaming, there was a void; but against the window, beating its wings, hooting, and struggling to get out, was a huge mealy-feathered owl. It forced a way through, took flight, and was seen no more; excepting when some night-wanderer descries the ill-omened bird skulking in the twilight wood, or obscure grove; and then he murmurs a prayer, to be delivered from the sin of uncharitableness, as he thinks of the transformed baker's daughter.

That evening, on their return to the cottage, Ophelia crept away softly to bed, marvelling much at Jutha's illness. But the hours crept on, and the little one's affectionate anxiety yielded to drowsiness. She slept; but it was an uneasy sleep, full of dreams. From this slumber she awoke strugglingly, and with a beating heart. It was pitch dark; she stretched out her arms to feel for Jutha at her side; but no Jutha was there. In alarm, she started up. What could have kept her away? The child listened. All seemed still below. What then could prevent Jutha from coming up to her room?

In alarm for her friend, Ophelia stole out of bed, and groped her way downstairs. On reaching the door of the sitting-room, she saw a bright streak of light from the crevice at the bottom. She felt for the latch above her head; and unfastened it. She pushed open the door; but the blaze of light from within, suddenly contrasted with the obscurity from which she had emerged, made her pause. She stood on the threshold, gazing in, trying to distinguish the objects the room contained. On the large table, in the centre of the apartment, lay something extended, which was covered with a white cloth. At one end were ranged as many iron lamps as the cottage household afforded, burning in a semicircular row. Amazed at this strange sight, the child advanced to the table, and raised the end of the white cloth, nearest to the lamps. Their light fell full upon the object beneath. Startled, and shuddering, the child looked upon that which was so familiar, yet so strange. Could that indeed be the face of Jutha?—that white, still, rigid thing?

—with those breathless, motionless lips, and those eyelids, that looked fixed, rather than closed? The child involuntarily stretched forth her finger and touched its cheek. The icy cold, shot, with a sharp thrill to her heart, and she screamed aloud, as she flung herself upon it with wild kisses and tears.

Botilda, hearing the cry, came running in. She used her best efforts to calm the affrighted child, carrying her up to bed, lying down by her side, folding her in her arms, and speaking fondlingly and soothingly to her, until she dropped asleep. But it was long ere this was accomplished; and for many successive nights the nurse had to sleep in the room with her charge, that she might be won to rest. The shock she had received was severe; and long left its effects upon her sensitive organization. She shrank about, scared, fearful of she hardly knew what, but feeling full of a vague uneasiness and alarm.

One night, Ophelia lay awake,—a prey to fancies and terrors that would not let her close her eyes. Botilda, after sharing her bed for many nights, thinking that the child had by this time recovered the late shock, had left her, to return to her own room, after seeing her softly drop off into her first sleep. But from this the little girl had suddenly started, broad awake, trembling and agitated, with a frightful dream she had been dreaming; of digging down into Jutha's grave, with a mad desire to look upon her face once more,—of finding it, only to see it change into that of Ulf; who, raising himself from the coffin, groped among the mould, and drew forth a little baby's white arm, which he fell to scratching and marring with briars. The horror of the sight awoke her; she struggled into a sitting posture, stared through the dim space, and found herself alone in that dreary room. She could just distinguish the blank square spot where the window was. There was deep snow upon the ground—which cast a sickly glare, the moon partially shining from amid haze and clouds. The familiar objects in the room looked shadowy and spectral in that uncertain light. At length it seemed to her, that among them,—there—yonder —at the farther end of the room, she saw something move. It was dark, and stole along without noise. She shuddered; and shrank beneath the bed-clothes. Her heart beat violently,—

so loud, that she could have counted the thumps amid the distraction of hearing her teeth keep a bewildering counter-current of strokes, in a rapid timing of their own. Presently, she clenched them firmly, that she might listen to something that caught her ear beside the tumult of her own pulses. She thought she heard a muffled sound, as if something swept against the coverlet of her bed. She would have shrieked aloud; but her parched throat refused to give utterance to the cry of terror that choked her. Could it be an animal? Was it anything alive? Or were there indeed wandering shapes of evil permitted to visit the earth in night and darkness, as wild tales hinted? The child's dismay hurriedly pointed to such questions; but on a sudden her attention was attracted to quite a different source. There was a noise of trampling feet in the snow outside; a sound of many voices; a loud knocking at the door of the cottage; and upon her finding courage to look from beneath the bed-clothes, she could see the light of torches flashing through the window. Then there came a stir in the house; hasty steps ascended the stairs; and in another moment the door of her room was flung open, and in the midst of the stream of light that poured in, a figure appeared, which rushed forward to the bed where she lay, exclaiming:—"My child! my dear, dear child! My little Ophelia!"

"Mamma!" was the instinctive reply, as the child felt herself gathered into the soft security of a mother's bosom.

The lady Aoudra could not sufficiently feast her eyes upon her daughter's face; but as she gazed, she became aware of the burning spot that glowed and deepened in the young cheek—the too bright sparkle of the eyes,—the unnatural restlessness of the lips which at length wore an almost vacant smile, while the fingers idly played among the long curls of her mother's hair, drooping over her. In alarm, the lady caught her child's hand in hers; it was feverishly hot.

"I have been culpably unheedful—inconsiderate; I shall have only my own rash selfishness to blame, should the surprise have been too much for my darling. Yet who would have expected such sensitiveness—such susceptibility in one so young? Dear child! Mother's own treasure! Mother's little tender one!"

Fondly, gently, she set about repairing the mischief she feared she had done. She shaded the light away from the too eager eyes; she coaxed them to close,—to cease to look upon her, by clasping one of the hands in hers, that the child might know she was still there; she lay down beside her, parting the hair back upon the heated forehead, giving her from time to time cooling drinks, and suggesting none but peaceful happy thoughts, in the low soft talking she murmured the while in her ear. Lulled thus, the child fell into slumber; but for some hours it was a disturbed, uneasy one, giving the lady many a pang of dread and self-reproach. Violent startings, abrupt twitching of the limbs, talking in her sleep, muttered ends of songs and mournful tunes alternately alarmed the watcher. Once, the little girl sprang suddenly up, trembling, and looking about her with a scared eagerness of expectation, clinging convulsively to the arm stretched to receive her; but when she felt herself enfolded within a mother's embrace, lapped in that balmy atmosphere of maternity, she sank into profound rest.

Holy mother-love! nearest semblance vouchsafed to mortals of Divine protection! Benignest human symbol of God's mercy to man! There is a blessed influence, a sacred joy, a plenitude of satisfaction, in the very presence of a mother, that plainer speaks the mysterious beatitude of Heaven itself to earthly intelligence, than aught else in existence.

The little Ophelia awoke next morning from her healing sleep, revived, and quite herself. She was so free from the feverish symptoms which had alarmed her mother, overnight, that Aoudra thought that she might venture to remove her at once to their home at Elsinore.

In the new scene to which she was introduced the child acquired unwonted spirits. She appeared averse from speaking, or even thinking, of the period she had spent at the cottage. She never reverted to it of her own accord; and it was avoided altogether; the lady Aoudra only regretting that she had ever been compelled to leave her little one in what had evidently been so uncongenial a home.

Her chief care was now to surround her child with none but pleasant, healthful influences of person, scene and circumstance.

She kept her as much as possible in her own society, and in that of her father—the lord Polonius,—whenever his court duties permitted him to be at home. Her young son, Laertes, was with them, for a period, until the time should arrive for his going to the university. Meantime, masters were engaged; and the children pursued their studies together; though the lady Aoudra chiefly superintended those of her little girl herself.

The affection that now had full opportunity of taking its natural growth between father and child, contributed greatly to the happiness of Ophelia's new existence. Polonius became dotingly fond of his little girl; and she in turn reverenced him with all duteous affection. She would watch for his home-coming; soon getting to know the hours of his return from attendance at the palace; and then she would set his easy-chair, and bring his slippers, and the furred gown, for which he exchanged his court robes, when indulging in domestic ease; and then he would pat her cheek, or pass his hand over her fair young head, and say some fondling words of rejoicing that he now possessed so pretty a living toy at home as his little daughter, to beguile his leisure hours.

He was a good-natured man, of a kindly disposition, with much original shrewdness, and a great deal of acquired worldly knowledge. He was an odd compound of natural familiarity, and assumed dignity; of affability, and importance; of condescension, and dictatorialness; of garrulous ease, and ostentation. He was often jocular, and would twinkle his half merry, half astute eyes, rubbing his hands with a chuckling air of enjoyment, as if he had not a thought beyond the relish of the immediate jest; but, some time after, as if willing to show that it was the mere momentary unbending of the great statesman, he would knit his brow, lean back in his chair, with his hand supporting his chin, and look meditative.

He was fond of parcelling out his speech into formal divisions; of putting forth his opinions in set phrases; he was full of precept; sententious in speech; and uttered his axioms in an authoritative voice. He spoke preceptively. He would talk to his wife in manner of an oration; clearing his voice, and pausing a little, as if to bespeak full attention ere he began.

He liked to see those around him performing audience to his dicta. He would address the guests at his table, as if they were a committee, or a board of council; and harangue rather than converse. He prided himself on great foresight and perspicacity.

He ordinarily prefaced with a hem; and emphasized, as he went on, with one hand in the palm of the other, or by reckoning off each clause, successively, on his fingers. He collected attention by canvassing glances; gathered it in by sharp espial upon those in whom he perceived symptoms of its straying; and kept it from wandering by a short admonitory cough. He affected diplomacy and expediency in action; mystery in expression; craft in device. He piqued himself on ingenuity in compassing his ends; and in their accomplishment preferred contrivance and cunning to the commonplace means of straightforward procedure.

In consequence of this system of their father's, his praise was sometimes as mysterious and unexpected to the young Laertes and Ophelia as his reproof.

On one occasion, he called them to him and commended them highly for never having been into a certain gallery, which he had built out into his garden for the reception of some pictures, bequeathed to him by a French nobleman—a friend of his—lately dead.

Seeing a look of surprise on their faces, he added:—"Ah, you marvel how I came to know so certainly that you never went in. But I have methods deep and sure,—a little bird, or my little finger,—in few, you need not assure me, that you never entered that gallery; for I happen to be aware, beyond a doubt, that you never did. And I applaud your discretion."

"But we did go in;" said Ophelia.

"What, child? Pooh, impossible! Come to me; look me full in the face." Not that she looked down, or aside, or anything but straight at him; but he always used this phrase conventionally, when he conducted an examination. "I tell you, you never went into that gallery; I know it for a fact. There's no use in attempting to deceive your father. I should have dis-

covered it, had you gone into that room without my permission."

"But did you not wish us to go there? I never knew you forbade it?" said Laertes. "If we had known you had any objection, neither Ophelia nor I would have——"

"I never forbade it, certainly," interrupted his father; "but I had strong reasons for wishing that you should not go into the room till the pictures were hung. You might have injured them. No, no; I know better than to let heedless children play there; so I took means to prevent your entering the gallery without my knowledge."

"But we did play there, every day, father;" said Laertes.

"Yes;" said Ophelia.

"And I tell you impossible! Listen to me; I fastened a hair across the entrance. The invisible barrier is yet unbroken. So that you see, you could not have passed through the door without my knowledge."

"But we didn't go through the door, papa; we got in at the window!" exclaimed both the children. "We didn't know you wished us not to play there; so, finding a space which the builders had left, in one of the windows that look into the garden, we used to creep in there, and amuse ourselves with looking at the new pictures. We did no harm; only admired."

Time went on. Laertes, now a tall stripling, was sent to Paris—then famous as a seat of learning.

Ophelia grew into delicate girlhood. Ever quiet, ever diffident, but serene and happy. A tranquil-spirited maiden, unexacting, even-tempered, affectionate; one of those upon whom the eyes and hearts of all near, dwell with a feeling of repose.

Her father now began to look forward to his long-cherished hope of introducing her at court; where he beheld her already attracting his sovereign's gracious notice, and winning the favour of the queen. He imparted his views to his wife; adding that all Ophelia wanted, was a little forming in manner, to render her presentable; and to that end, he intended cultivating for

her the acquaintance of a young lady, daughter to a friend of his, the lord Cornelius.

Aoudra ventured the pardonable motherly remark, that their young Ophelia was perfectly well-bred; a gentlewoman in every particular.

"Tut, tut, lady mine;" interrupted Aoudra's husband, with a wave of the hand, which she well knew to be of final significancy. "Lady Thyra is in all respects what I could best wish for my girl's friend. The lord Cornelius is as anxious as myself for the improvement of the acquaintance; and it is my will that henceforth the families shall be intimate. Let it be looked to."

Soon, no morning was spent apart; and Thyra, intent upon enjoying her new friend's society uninterruptedly, made a point of receiving Ophelia alone, and of appointing her usual visitors in the evening only, henceforward. She could assume a pretty tyranny—a kind of playful despotism, when she chose. It sat well on her; and her friends submitted to it,—well-pleased,—as only another grace, in the graceful Thyra.

"You know, sweet friend, we could not find the way to each other's hearts were we to meet in a crowd every day, instead of thus familiarly, doing and saying exactly what we please, while together, as we do now; do we not?" said she to Ophelia, as they sat together, in Thyra's pleasant room. "Besides, I mean you to know something of the people you will meet, before you come among them, since you have owned to me, with that charming simplicity and frankness of yours, that you feel some awe at the thought of encountering strangers."

"I have so little seen of strange faces;" said Ophelia. "My father's guests are chiefly men high in office, counsellors of state, grave and dignified personages; and my dear mother, thinking one so young could not as yet derive advantage from their conversation, allowed me to keep our own apartments when there were visitors."

"Come, with whom shall I begin? Methinks I'll commence at once with the highest. Our sovereign and his queen have honoured my father's house with their presence, but I may not, of course, count their majesties among my visitors; the king's

brother, however, lord Claudius, is not an unfrequent guest here, and he——"

"You have been presented to their majesties? You know the king's person—the queen's; tell me somewhat of them."

"The king is a grave-looking man; warlike and noble in his bearing; full of dignity and command; and looks,—as he indeed is—the accomplished soldier and ruler. The queen is very beautiful, both in face and person. Graciously condescending in the kind notice and encouragement she accorded to myself—a young girl undergoing her first presentation."

"And what of the prince, their son; Lord Hamlet? I have heard my father speak of him as a student of great repute; he says, that he has won high academic honours; and if he were not of royal birth, he could make himself illustrious, as a man of learning."

"Nay, he's even too much of the scholar, for my taste;" said the lively Thyra.

"What sort of man must he be to embody Thyra's idea of manly perfection?" said her young friend.

"Nay—I cannot tell—not I"—replied Thyra, with a momentary embarrassment; then recovering herself, she went on:—"Not such a man as my lord Claudius, assuredly. He comes next to tell thee of. There's something marvellously unattractive to me, about that lord. Though he be of blood-royal, he looks not noble; and though his lineage be high, he hath naught lofty in his mien. Let me see: who else? O, ay; there are Osric of Stolzberg, and Eric of Kronstein, two lords whose estates adjoin that of my father; you will often meet them here. Truly, I know not why I classed them together; for they differ in every particular, save in being provincial neighbours of ours. The young lord of Stolzberg is a coxcomb; while the lord of Kronstein is—is—well, perhaps, something very near the ideal we spoke of, ere now."

Thyra paused a moment, with a little conscious laugh; while she stole a glance at Ophelia's face; but she saw it looking so quiet, so girl-like innocent, that she went on:—"It is not every one who finds Kronstein so gifted, or Stolzberg so inane. General opinion lackeys the rich lordling, Stolzberg, and can

scarce allow the personal desert of the accomplished, but acre-dipped Kronstein. Certain it is, that my father and I differ widely in our estimate of their respective attractions. He favours the one, while I——"

"While you judge the lord of Kronstein to be the superior man, however he may be the poorer lord;" said Ophelia, simply.

"Yes, dear novice;" rejoined Thyra. "I must call thee novice, dear Ophelia, thou seem'st to me so nun-like new to all worldly thoughts and ideas. My social experience shall help you in learning to face strangers; and thy novice candour shall teach me the beauty of unworldliness. Let me commence the lessons I am to give, by initiating you in the mysteries of chess,—now the most fashionable of games."

"Is it so much played?"

"Yes. For some time it was banished from court, after that fatal game, famous in our Danish chronicles, when the sovereign dynasty was changed by a choleric blow with a chess-board; but of late, the taste has revived. We have some skilful players amongst us. The lord of Kronstein is masterful at it. He was my instructor."

"Then you are, doubtless, now, a well-skilled player yourself, dear Thyra. I fear you will find me an unhopeful scholar;' said Ophelia.

At this moment, an attendant entered. "I can see no visitors to-day;" Thyra said, impatiently, as she ranged the pieces on the board. "See that I am denied to every one; and say that I receive this evening."

"I stated such to be your ladyship's orders," said the attendant; "but my lord would take no refusal: he bade me carry up his name—the lord Eric of Kronstein, madam."

The colour flushed into Thyra's face; but she said in a composed voice—"Give entrance to my lord of Kronstein; he doubtless brings intelligence from Rosenheim—from my father." Then, as the servant quitted the room, she added:—"I make an exception in this visitor's favour, dear Ophelia, because I think thou wilt feel curiosity to see one of whom we have been speaking so much."

Her manner showed so much agitation, such blushing joy, that it could not have failed betraying her secret to one more versed in such tell-tale symptoms than her young companion. But Ophelia perceived in it only the animation with which a friend would naturally be welcomed.

Besides, her attention was principally engaged by the newcomer. There was something in his appearance which struck her with a singular impression, as of something remembered—something long since seen.

Presently her friend performed the ceremony of introduction. He bowed courteously; and was about to resume his conversation, when something, in the cursory glance he had bestowed upon Ophelia, seemed to strike him, also, with a vague sense of recollection. He hesitated; looked at her; but seeming to obtain no confirmation of his passing fancy from what he saw, upon this second view of the tall slight figure before him, he pursued his conversation with the lady Thyra.

"But these papers my father requires, my lord; did he say where they were to be found?"

"He bade me tell you, you would find them in the ebon cabinet, by his study-chair, lady; this sealed packet, with which he charged me for you, contains the key, together with more precise directions for your guidance."

"I will seek them at once, my lord, since your return must needs be immediate. But remember," she added, with a resumption of vivacity; "your friends in Elsinore will look eagerly for your coming soon among them again."

His eyes followed her, as she withdrew to fetch the packet; and when she disappeared, he turned, in an abstracted manner, to the table on which the chess-board stood; and played mechanically with one of the pieces, twirling it round and round upon its circular foot.

A slight incident will sometimes prompt a struggling memory. The form of the ivory piece caught Ophelia's eye; and suddenly she exclaimed:—"The knight! The white horse! I remember—the wood—lord Eric—ay, that was the name. I recollect it, now. It was you then, who——"

"Hush! Can it be possible?" was the hasty exclamation,

as he looked round to see that no one was near. "'Sdeath!" he muttered; "the unopened rosebud, by all that's strange! How came she here? How came she to be there?"

"You never returned after Jutha became so altered, so ill? You never knew that she died?"

The lip blanched to well-nigh the whiteness of the chess-man that had lately touched it.

"I knew you would be sorry for her, when you came to hear of it. You were kind to her; you liked her. Poor Jutha!"

"Be silent, I conjure you, young lady. Do not speak that name again—it can do no good—it may do fearful harm."

Ophelia answered in her own quiet way:—"I have never mentioned her. She had almost faded from my own thought, as had your face and person. I was a little child then; at nurse, in that remote country place."

Thyra reappeared.

Eric of Kronstein tarried not long after he had received the packet from her hands. Promising to deliver it faithfully, he took a graceful leave of the two young ladies.

They both remained silent for a considerable space; each occupied with her own thoughts. Then, Thyra, rousing herself from her reverie, said:—"Forgive me, sweet friend, that I am such dull company. Come; now for our first study of chess."

The quiet chess-mornings, the brilliant social evenings, enjoyed with Thyra, made Ophelia's time speed pleasantly away; while she could not but observe, that at all seasons, at all hours, Eric of Kronstein was ever the favourite guest of her friend.

In one of the large apartments of the palace sat a lady, surrounded by her attendant ladies, working at a tapestry-frame. In a deep embayed window, at some distance from her, stood a man, regarding her earnestly from beneath his bent brows and drooping lids.

The man, was Claudius, the king's brother. The lady, was Queen Gertrude.

The weather had been unusually warm. The soft afternoon

air crept in by the open windows; and through the apartment there reigned the silence that grows with a sense of enjoyment and refreshment. It had for some time been preserved unbroken, when one of the attendant ladies exclaimed: "His majesty the king; madam."

Gertrude rose to receive her royal husband. He came to tell her of letters that had arrived from Wittenberg; bringing news of fresh academic honours attained by their son, Hamlet; and other despatches from the royal forces engaged in a northern warfare, which had terminated in conquest to Denmark. The king concluded by saying that so much happy intelligence arriving on one day deserved some token of remembrance; and that he had brought one in the shape of a gemmed bracelet, which he prayed her to wear as the gift not only of a proud and happy father, and of a rejoicing monarch, but as that of a loving husband. As the king fondly leant over the beautiful arm presented to him, that he might clasp the jewel upon it, a sharp inward groan burst from the lips of Claudius.

"My brother!" exclaimed the king. "I did not perceive your presence. Are you not well, my Claudius?" he added, approaching the recess where he leaned. "Tell me, tell your brother, what you ail?"

"An old wound—a hurt—'tis nothing;" he answered, looking down.

"Our own leech shall examine it;" the king said, in his gentle manner. "Sweet Gertrude, come hither; use you your womanly persuasion, with this refractory brother of ours, to have his hurt examined."

As the queen advanced in obedience to her royal husband's bidding, the king took her hand, and placing it on his brother's arm, said:—"I shall find, on my return, you have won our brother to our wish. The summer afternoon woos me forth, to walk awhile in mine orchard. Meantime, prosper you in your suit, my queen."

When the king had left the apartment, she withdrew her hand, and retired a pace or two from her close vicinity to Claudius. He breathed hard, and there was almost a fierceness in the tone with which he uttered the words:—"He bade

you sue me, madam. A 'loving husband,' forsooth! Why, his is a tame affection which can leave a wife, to go sleep in the shade of a cool orchard, while mine is a burning passion that consumes me. Ardour such as mine befits a 'loving husband;' not the puling caresses of that dotard."

"My lord! Remember you of whom you speak?—of your brother—your king—my husband."

"Ay, madam—your husband—your 'loving husband!'" He ground his teeth, muttering a curse. "The very hem of your garment stirs me to more adoring warmth than he is capable of feeling;" he presumed to add, as he clenched within his hand the end of a light drapery, which formed part of her attire.

"You presume on my forbearance, my lord!" exclaimed the queen. "You cannot believe that I will listen longer to such rash speech." She would have withdrawn from the recessed window; but perceiving that a portion of her robe was within his grasp, she feared lest the movement might attract the attention of her ladies to this circumstance, and so betray to them what was passing. A veriest trifle, such as this, will suffice to sway the conduct of a weak-souled woman.

At this moment an attendant entered to announce that the lord Polonius and his daughter, the lady Ophelia, craved audience of her majesty.

"Conduct them to the presence-chamber;" said the queen; "I will receive them there."

The edge of robing was still detained for an instant; then she felt it suddenly released, and she was free to go. She moved away from the side of Claudius, without suffering her eyes to look towards him; and, attended by her ladies, she left the apartment.

As she proceeded along a gallery of the palace, on her way to the state-chamber, one of her ladies exclaimed;—"See here, madam; some treacherous doorway hath torn away a fragment from your majesty's attire; the piece is fairly wrenched out. Alack! the beauty of the robe is marred."

"Get other tires ready. I will change these anon, when my lord Polonius shall have taken leave;" said queen Gertrude.

"It must needs have been some unheeded violence of a closing door, or other like accident. 'Tis no matter."

"A passing sweet temper hath her majesty, to regard the wreck of such embroidery as that without so much as a fretful word;" thought the lady-in-waiting.

One evening, Ophelia and Thyra sat together; the hours grew, and with them the impatience of Thyra. She was expecting lord Eric, who had promised to come; but still the time for his appearance went by, and he came not. Night drew on, and yet he came not.

Next morning, at an early hour, Polonius entered the apartment where his wife and daughter were, and by the ostentatious perturbation of his manner evidently desired that they should ask what was the matter. The lady Aoudra dutifully did so.

He told her that he had that moment received intelligence of a circumstance which had occasioned great consternation in certain quarters. It was reported that lord Eric of Kronstein was discovered to be utterly ruined; that he had gambled away his patrimonial estate, that he was not worth a farthing, and that in order to escape from the crowd of demands which pressed upon him, he had, last night, under favour of darkness, embarked in a vessel bound for the Archipelago.

"But I must not tarry here," he continued, "I must away to a privy-council meeting that sits this morning. His majesty laid his gracious commands on me to let him have the help of this poor brain of mine. He is pleased to think it of some little avail in weighty questions that concern the state. Well, well; it may be so. It may be so."

Away hurried the courtier; and the silence that ensued after his departure, was first broken by Ophelia's exclaiming:—

"My poor friend! And this is the man she deems worthy of all esteem and liking. To whom she has given her whole heart! 'Twill be best kindness to her now, to reveal her secret to you, my mother, that we may have your experience and counsel to aid her."

Hastily she told her mother of Thyra's attachment for Kron-

stein; of all she knew of him herself; of her former meeting with him; and of his request that she would not revert to it.

"We will hasten to your friend Thyra," said Lady Aoudra, "to warn her against the evils she can avoid; to comfort her in the grief she will have to endure."

On arriving at Cornelius's mansion, they found from her attendants that the lady Thyra had not yet left her room.

"She lies late, ordinarily, dear mother. Let us seek her in her chamber. Her friend Ophelia is privileged to come to her at all seasons,—even when she is, as now, a slug-a-bed."

She went at once to the sleeping-room. She saw at a glance that Thyra was not lying there; but as she was retiring, a something within the curtains, at the bed's foot, caught her eye. It was the figure of her friend, half hidden among them. Ophelia went gently forwards, to embrace her; but as she extended her arms to wrap them about Thyra's form, it swung heavily away from her, a mere heap of inanimate matter—an image,—a corse! It was the dead body of Thyra, hanging, where her own desperate hand had stifled out life. Near to her was afterwards found a paper, with these words :—

"My father!

"Forgive your child. You destined my hand to one whom I could not love. I pledged faith to one whom I loved only too well. He whom I so fatally trusted, has proved unworthy and false. He fled. What is left me, but to die? Deal indulgently by my memory.

"THYRA."

When Ophelia was lifted from the floor, where she had fallen prostrate, she was in strong convulsions. The shock she had received produced a severe illness. For a long space she lay in the utmost danger, now wandering in delirium, now sunk into a heavy stupor. From one of these deep sleeps, she once awoke, stretching forth her hand feebly, and uttering a faint word or two. Her mother, who had never quitted her side, perceived the movement, and bent over her, to catch the sense of the murmured sound.

"Is the king dead?"

"I trust not, dear one. He is absent in Norway; and the last despatches brought intelligence of his safety."

"Methought I saw him, dead;" said Ophelia. "I have been dreaming strangely. He seemed dead, as I saw him—though he moved before me, waving his arm toward them. He pointed to them, as each appeared."

"Of whom do you speak, dear child?"

"Of those figures—those women. It was down by the brook—among the reeds—beneath the willow;—not the stream in the wood—but the brook yonder, which flows into the castle-moat. That solitary spot—all rush-grown, and shadowy—where the water creeps on sluggish and slow, margined by rank grass, and river-weeds,—you remember?"

Her mother gave tokens of assent.

"It was there she sat,—the first figure I saw. The night was obscure; there was a veil of haze upon tree, and shrub, and brook; but I saw her plainly, and knew her at once, before she shook back her long hair, and wrung her hands, and moaned; it was Jutha, mother!"

"I would have gone towards her, but my feet were rooted to the spot; while, close beside me, there gradually shaped itself into substance a form that seemed to grow out of the shadowy night air. It became the distinct semblance of the king, as I saw him ride to the Norwegian wars; save, that his face was pale and all amort—ghastly, and set in death. He turned this wan visage full upon me, as he pointed to the figure of her who sat lamenting."

"Dear Ophelia, thou shalt not recall these sad images; let me tell thee, dear one, of thy father, who——"

"But there were two others, I saw. One was my poor Thyra. I knew her by a terrible token." And Ophelia's voice became nearly extinct, as she added:—"her livid throat, mother; and there was a space between her feet and the ground, as she glided past me."

A moment's pause; and then Ophelia went on.

"The mailed figure again stretched forth his pointing hand. The wind sighed amid the reeds. The heads of nettles and

long-purples were stirred by the night breeze, as it swept on mournfully. The air seemed laden with heavy sobbings. Then I saw one approach, whose face I could not see, and whose figure I knew not. She was clothed in white, all hung about with weeds and wild flowers; and from among them stuck ends of straw, that the shadowy hands seemed to pluck and spurn at; and then the white figure moved on, impelled towards the water. I saw her glide on, floating upon its surface; I saw her dimly, among the silver-leaved branches of the drooping willow, as they waved around and above her, upbuoyed by her spreading white garments."

The mother shuddered, as her eye fell upon the white night-gear of her child, telling the vision. But, at this moment, Polonius softly entered the room, having heard, that his daughter had awakened, better; and that she was talking more collectedly than she had done since her illness. He was soon busily engaged, in his half fussy, half kindly manner, chiding Aoudra for indulging Ophelia with two much licence of speech; and making many remarks equally sapient and facetious, on women's love of talk, their proneness for confabulation and gossip.

Thanks to Aoudra's tender nursing, Ophelia was restored to health. But a more severe blow than any she had yet sustained now awaited her.

Death, which had spared herself, took her mother from her. It is true that the anguish of sudden separation was not theirs. For some time Aoudra lingered; hers was a gradual decay, without pain, and without loss of faculty. She was able to give her child those counsels which should best protect her in her approaching entrance upon the world's experience; while the daughter was permitted the comfort of yielding the gentle ministerings—the loving tendance which best alleviate sickness and suffering.

Thus it came, that—from her mother's warning, at this time, as, from her father's and her brother's admonitions, at a subsequent period,—Ophelia had the perils which awaited her, in her future life at court, peculiarly impressed upon her mind.

After the lady Aoudra's death, both the king and the queen made it their study by almost parental kindness to the motherless girl, to lighten the affliction of her loss. They were rather like affectionate and gracious friends, than her sovereigns. They showed by their eagerness to have her as much as possible with them, that they would fain act the part of loving relations by her; and she soon learned to regard them with as fond an attachment.

The prince Hamlet joined his royal parents in their attempt to soften the grief of Ophelia; and in this gentle task, his own growing preference for her gained strength and fixedness of purpose. His refined taste was attracted by her maiden beauty; his delicacy of feeling taught him to delight in her innocence, her retiring diffidence; his masculine intellect found repose in the contemplation of her artless mind: his manly soul dwelt with a kind of serene rapture on the sweet feminine softness of her nature. As time went on, tokens of his increasing regard, awoke a responsive feeling in her breast towards him. But while this fair flower of love was springing up between them,—near to it lurked in unsuspected rankness of growth, the foul unwholesome weed of a forbidden passion.

The realm of Denmark was thrown into dismay by the sudden death of its monarch. The good king,—so it was reported,—while sleeping, as was his afternoon wont, in the orchard which formed part of the palace-grounds, had been stung by a serpent; and from the venom inflicted by the wound, he had instantly sickened and died.

Ere the nation could recover from its consternation, and while the rightful heir to the throne was plunged into filial grief, Claudius seized the crown, and caused himself to be proclaimed king. Scarcely had this first bold step been securely taken when it was followed up by the solemnity of coronation; and shortly after, by the ceremonial of marriage between the reigning monarch and his late brother's widow.

The habitual acquiescence with which royal proceedings are for the most part regarded by the populace, could hardly restrain the expressions of dissatisfaction which these events excited. But they occurred in such rapid succession, that they

passed without attempted opposition. Moreover, the lavish splendour, with which the two rites of royal marriage and coronation were solemnized, had their effect upon the vulgar mind. Claudius knew the full advantage of investing his royal proceedings with the glare of pomp; and he caused the rumour of the surpassing magnificence which was to mark the approaching ceremonies at the Danish court, to be spread far and wide; and, among the many attracted from a distance to witness so gorgeous a scene, young Laertes, Ophelia's brother, came from France, that he might be present.

He was pleased with this opportunity for spending some time with a sister whom he so tenderly loved; for though during their life they had been much separated, yet in those intervals that they had been together, he had learned to appreciate the affectionate nature of this gentle being. Besides, they had been in the habit of corresponding with one another by letter; and thus the attachment between them had been maintained and cemented. To this means of intercourse he reverted, when,—the regal pageant concluded,—Laertes prepared to return to France. As he bade her farewell, he prayed her to let no long time elapse ere he should hear from her.

And she, in her own quiet, though earnest way, in her own simple sincerity of manner, replied:—

"*Do you doubt that?*"

HAMLET, Act i. Sc. 3.

"What to this was sequent, thou know'st already."

TALE IX.

ROSALIND AND CELIA; THE FRIENDS.

TWO ladies were pursuing their way homeward, conversing gaily. The weather was so lovely, their road, skirting the forest, so beautiful, that they preferred the freedom of horseback to the confinement of a coach. They accordingly rode, attended by a proper retinue, such as beseemed their rank: they being the daughter and niece of Duke Frederick, then reigning in his banished brother's stead.

The afternoon sun enriched the scene with its warm glow of beauty, while the shade of the trees, which fringed their road on one side, formed a welcome screen from its ardour. They neared a spot they had often stopped to admire. It was a rude stone fountain, celebrated for the sparkling purity of its waters, which flowed from a moss-grown rocky recess; it was situated on a grassy slope, and was over-arched by a thick umbrage of tall and spreading trees.

As the ladies approached, they perceived a figure sitting by the side of the well. It was that of a stripling. His head rested on the stone brink; his limbs were stretched forth in the attitude of thorough weariness; his dress and shoes were covered with dust; his whole appearance betokened that he slept the sound sleep of fatigue. His face was partly hidden upon his folded arms; but one of the grooms, dismounting to obtain a cup of the fresh fountain water for his young mistress, touched the lad on the arm, and asked him if he had no better manners than to lie lounging there in the presence of ladies;

and then the countenance revealed to view, shone with good-humour, though he affected to be angry at being disturbed.

"My lady may desire a draught of cold water," he said, "but her need must be great, an' it equal mine for rest; my weariness against her thirst, for any sum thou lik'st to name. I fear me, though, the stakes would be all on one side, like an ill-built paling; for my pocket is free from trouble,—it hath not a cross to bear."

"I am sorry thou hast been awakened on my account, good friend;" said Celia. "Sweet rest is too precious to be interrupted for an idle wish, that scarce amounted to a want."

"A lady's caprice has broken many a rest, madam, ere now;" returned the youth, glancing up at her with a merry look, while he removed the cap from his head, and stood before her. "But in truth, there are some faces well worth losing sleep for; and had I not been awakened to look upon the one I now see, I had lost a sight better than twenty such naps—sweetened, though mine was, by hunger and way-faring."

"Thou hast walked a long distance?" asked Celia.

"All the way from Chateau Fadasse, madam. To tell your ladyship heaven's truth—I ran away from that very Chateau, no longer ago than this morning."

"Chateau Fadasse?" repeated Celia, musingly. "I have heard my father speak of a baron of that name."

"Ay, madam; the same, doubtless," replied the youth. "I was born there; and bred there, if that may be called breeding which was rather a breaking-in to live upon ill-usage and broken victuals. In the baron's household, my father filled the office of jester until Death called him to a better place, promoting him from the Fadasse service to that of the King of Terrors. Though service be no inheritance, yet I succeeded to my father's, and served the baron for a fool,—as I was, staying so long to be made a fool of, and to be kicked and cudgelled like an ass. At last I bethought me that I might take it as a hint that I was kicked out; and so set forth with a broad prospect before me, if not a fair one,—the wide world."

"And now thou hast no home, my poor friend?"

"If your ladyship call me so, or, better still, be a friend to me, then have I no great need to bewail, what is, after all, no great loss."

"But hast thou nowhere to lay thy head?" pursued she, amused with his replies.

"No other pillow than holy Jacob's, madam,—a stone. But that which brought a dream of angels to a patriarch wanderer, may well serve an erring youth like myself."

"Thou hast not wherewithal to eat a meal, hast thou?" she asked.

"To say sooth, madam, no daintier food than hog-fare,—beechmast and acorns; with mayhap, hips and haws, and such odd bird-berries: but the hedge and the brook have furnished meat and drink, ere now, to famishing scholars, why not to a starving fool?"

"I like this fellow's spirit well, Rose;" said Celia, turning to her cousin; "'tis a cheerful spirit; one that will take him his bites from the cherry-cheeked side of the apple, through life. What say'st thou? Shall we bid him come with us? We'll provide him a home; and he shall supply us with mirth."

"A fair bargain, and a kindly; thou'lt do well to strike it, coz."

"Art thou content to follow me?" said Celia, again addressing him.

"Ay, lady. Find but a stepping-stone beyond this round, slippery ball, the earth; an' you set your foot on it, mine shall scramble after. There is something in that look, which puts willingness, e'en for impossible feats, into heart and sinews of him that should be thy follower."

"Then, mount; and come with me. Gaspard, bring forward the sumpter-mule, that this lad may ride with us. And give him a ration from our store; for it's ill beginning new service by fasting."

"And my stomach hath struck a hollow sound for every hour I've spent in the forest since I entered it; which was at daybreak this morning. I thank your ladyship for the timely thought."

"And now tell me thy name, good fellow;" said Celia, as he fell in with the cavalcade, a little to the rear of her side.

"I was called cub, lout, hound, or cur, idle varlet, lazy swine, and such like, for the most part: though, in good sooth, none of them was my rightful style and title, as your ladyship's discernment will have already told you. But, truly, I care not now to be known by the name I bore when blows and privation were my daily having. Yonder well-brink, where I rested my head, being the stone on which turned my good fortune, I'll call myself, henceforth, no other than Touchstone. 'Tis the name given me by a fine brain of invention; and that may e'en stand in lieu of godfather and godmother, gossipry, and apostle-spoons."

"If it be the saving of apostle-spoons, it may yet need thee a long spoon, in the close quarters to which, through lack of a christian name, thou may'st be brought with the Prince of Darkness. Thou know'st the old proverb."

"Marry, the meeting with yourself, lady, is the silver spoon in the mouth of my new-born fate. I'll look to have no other."

"Nay, I think thou'lt furnish the spoon thyself. Thy pate will be thine own wooden ladle."

"It shall furnish my lady with a plentiful dish of merry conceits, skimming for her the froth of folly, and the cream of jesting. Thus the fool's treen spoon may indeed help himself, while it serves his mistress. It keeps his own heart light, and her in good humour."

"To be kept well stored in good humour, is both her benefit and his;" said Rosalind. "See thou that thy humour be good, fool, and I'll insure thee thy mistress's good-humour."

The cousins' life was made a happy one, by the fast friendship that existed between them. Rosalind, daughter to the banished Duke Gaston, had the consolation of learning that her father had, under adversity, attained a degree of philosophic composure, and even of cheerfulness, such as his friends at one time had not dared to think could ever again be his.

Hearing this, his child could scarce regard that as a calamity, which had brought about so blessed a result; and when she thought of him as a happier man, she almost forgot to deplore that he was no longer a duke: while Celia's native sprightliness of disposition, served to keep them both gay and blithe-hearted. It was an especial delight of Celia's to beguile her cousin into that mood of feeling, when a smile was too faint a token of the gladsome fancy; when nothing save a hearty laugh—that sweet ringing laugh of Rosalind's—would serve to express the exhilaration of spirit, the innocent joy of heart, which sprang from youth, health, and goodness.

Then Celia would say:—"What a delicious thing it is to hear thy laugh, Rose! If I am high fantastic melancholy, its most distant music will suffice to set my heart to dancing-measure."

"Thou melancholy! It must be high fantasy indeed, that would persuade thee thou had'st thy spirits tuned in that low key. Leave all such affectations, I prithee, to the gravity-mongers, who have no better claim to be thought capable of thought, than the putting on of a moody brow. A pretended melancholy is the shallow device of a wiseacre to get a character for wisdom; and a real melancholy befits scarce anything but guilt. 'Tis one of the merriest-conceited of jests, when such as thou,—good-conscienced people,—play at melancholy. Good conscience is not the stuff to breed genuine melancholy out of, believe me."

"How know you that I have a good conscience? What makes you so boldly pronounce upon me?"

"Marry, by these sure tokens; pleasant and infallible. Thou sleep'st sweetly o' nights, a sound token; thou wak'st cheerily and fresh o' mornings, a strong token; thou'rt ever free to note the thoughts of others, a good token thou hast no brooding secrets of thine own; thou hast a hand frank and ready to relieve the wants of those who need thy help, which denotes thine own few cares. Thou can'st eat thy meat without peppers and sauces, a wholesome token; thou car'st for no wine in thy fountain draught, a pure token; thou ne'er stick'st pins awry, a pointed token; ne'er wear'st unbecoming colours, a

vain token, an' thou wilt, but e'en let it pass for a woman's token; ne'er goest slatternly in thy garments, a neat token; or slipshod, a standing token; or neglect'st thy mirror, a clear token. Thou sing'st, and sigh'st not, when lost in thought, a glad token; thou seek'st thy bed with a step untired, and a spirit as alert as when thou first arose, a confirmed token; and thou art almost as soon asleep as a sailor, when once thy head touches thy pillow, a token upon which thou may'st set up thy rest that all I have said is true."

"Trust me, coz, I think, in the matter of an unbruised conscience, we may both thank the gods for having cast our fortunes in such happy mould, as to have given us no cause to lay the burthen of self-reproach on our souls;" answered Celia.

"'Twould be a step in charitable judgment, if the favoured among mortals thought of this when holding their moral heads above others less cared for by the blind woman on the wheel;" said Touchstone.

"Thou art there, art thou?" said Celia. "Hast thou carried our messages to those ladies I bade thee call upon, this morning, in our name?"

"Ay, madam. But truly, it demands some of the fool's philosophy,—videlicet, laughing at that which we cannot mend, —to enable a man bravely to face such insufferable moppets of silliness as some of these court-ladies are. One will build you her reputation upon an arm or an eye; and then you shall be fanned into a fever of admiration, or ogled out of countenance. Another will make a stand upon the beauty of her ankle, and then you must abide all the shock of display, for she will receive visitors no otherwise than reclining on her couch, playing a thousand pretty angers, saucy petulances, and poutings, the while, with her foot. A third sets up for a wit; and then, pray for Heaven's mercy on your patience and ears, for she will have none."

"If our court-ladies fare so hard in thy esteem, how stand the men in thy good liking?"

"Faith, madam, I can scarce call them 'men.' Had you said court-gentlemen, I could have answered better; for your courtier seems a different kind of creature from your man. 'He

bends so low, when congeeing and making a leg to the idols of his worship,—place and power, that he seemeth a link in Nature's animal creation, somewhere between human biped and base quadruped."

"But are not some of them lively companions? How say you to that facetious gentleman, the young lord Dubadin?"

"His gestures are flippant-nimble as a squirrel; but his ideas are heavy in their dull monotony as a caged bear, lumbering, ceaseless, to and fro, behind his bars. Bruin, as I have seen him in the court-menagerie, shouldering out the hours of his captivity, grudgingly indignant, ever stolidly striving against his own ponderous incapacity, is fittest emblem of my lord Dubadin's struggling thoughts. The companionship of such a fellow is among the most intolerable of pains."

"'Tis well to find philosophy for the endurance of a dull coxcomb, among other diseases we have to encounter;" said Rosalind.

"Aches and pains are of divers degrees and qualities, madam;" observed Touchstone. "There are some pains more difficult to bear with,—morally as well as physically,—than others. Is there any one that feels not the degradation of owning to a cholic? And who shall be so hardy as to crave sympathy for a cut thumb? The bravest of us would not dare bemoan himself for it."

"Therein are we women better off than our lords and masters. While sovereign man is denied the privilege of so much as a wry face—we may weep, tear our hair, sigh and lament ourselves to our heart's content. But come, your list of tolerable and intolerable pains. Give us your catalogue."

"Imprimis, there is your headache, which is an intellectual pain; then there is your heartache, a sentimental pain; there is the ache from gouty toe, a wealthy pain; there are the aches from sabre and sword thrust, from pistol and gunshot wounds, all esteemed honourable pains. None of these, men account it shame to endure; but few care to encounter the obloquy, as well as smart, of a plebeian pain, such as starving; and undignified pain like stomach-ache; an abject one, like sea-sickness; or a paltry pain like finger-ache, though its claims to distinction

were fester or whitlow. But see! There is your ladyship's messenger; with a despatch from La Vallée."

The letter from their dear friend, Flora de Beaupré, was a long one. It told of the period of happiness she had enjoyed while her promised husband was still near her. But then came the bitterness of parting, when he had to leave her and join his regiment; and after that came the dreariness of absence, during which her brother Raoul's morose humours had seemed more painful to bear than ever. Since then, however, worse had arisen. A certain chevalier Fadasse had taken a hunting-seat in their neighbourhood; he had formed an acquaintance with Raoul de Beaupré, which acquaintance had ripened into a strong liking, further cemented by a violent passion which the chevalier had chosen to conceive for Raoul's sister. When the count de Beaupré found that the chevalier Fadasse was the heir of a wealthy and powerful baron, the circumstance seemed at once to obliterate from his memory that his promise had been already given; for, upon the chevalier's applying to him for permission to address his sister Flora, he had at once granted it, forgetful that he had sanctioned her betrothal to Victor St. André.

All her protestations to the chevalier were treated as mere feints to veil her glad acceptance; while all her remonstrances with Raoul failed in moving him one jot from that which was now too evidently his settled purpose. Her love for Victor St. André gave her courage to brave her brother's ire by reminding him of his pledged word, passed on a former occasion; but he set aside all her urging, by saying that he knew the power which feudal rights gave him in the disposal of a sister, still a minor, in marriage; and that he gave her to understand, once for all, that it was his intention to avail himself of that power by bestowing her hand on the chevalier Fadasse, adding with a solemn oath:—"I am so resolved you shall then be his, that, if the last day of this moon pass, and you are still unmarried, you may e'en wed Victor St. André himself. I have sworn it, and nothing shall move me from my avowed decision. Though I retracted my word, I will not break my oath. But in order that there shall be no chance of your evading its fulfilment, I shall

lock you up, young mistress, in the turret-chamber, whence I think your own hot love will scarce furnish ye with wings or wit to escape."

Here she had remained ever since; alone, save when her jailer-brother brought her, in sullen silence, some daily food. She had beguiled her solitude by writing an account of her misery to her friends Celia and Rosalind, though with scarce a hope of the relation reaching them. But one evening she had been so fortunate as to observe their usual messenger in the garden, beneath the turret-window, looking about, as if in quest of her. She contrived to attract his attention; and by means of some ribbons knotted hastily together, she had succeeded in lowering her own letter, and raising the one brought for her.

Her friends gave her hard fate their cordial sympathy, and talked over many a plan for aiding her to escape from her imprisonment, and from the worse fate which was to end it; but none of them seemed feasible.

"See, here she says, that the window of her turret-chamber is strongly grated;" said Celia; "I think I remember hearing that it was originally used as a dungeon for refractory feudatories. Out upon him! To use his sister no better than a serf. Even could we succeed in gaining access to the outside of her window, by some one who should scale a ladder planted for her to descend, I know not how she could be drawn through those close-set iron bars."

"Minerva, mother of mother-wit, though thyself motherless, inspire me with thy inventive wisdom!" cried Rosalind with sudden glee. "God Phœbus with his light, Dan Mercury with his cunning, lend me their several aids! For methinks, I have a scheme seething here in my brain, which perchance may prove a goodly one for our purpose. The gods delight in sacrifices; but surely not in such a one as this,—the offering up of an unhappy virgin on the altar of a detested wedlock. Let us invoke them to further a plot which shall prevent poor Flora's immolation."

"Right willingly;" said Celia; "tell me thy scheme, that I may help thee, heart and soul, with prayer for its success, even if I cannot assist thee in its planning."

"Let us to our room, then; where we may talk, secure from all chance of eaves-droppers."

The chevalier Fadasse was walking one evening in his orchard. He paced backwards and forwards, and seemed employed in pleasing meditations, for he not unfrequently smiled. He was startled from his profound contemplation by the sudden appearance of a strange figure. It was a man masked and muffled in a dark cloak, who stood immediately in his path.

"What mummery is this?" asked the chevalier with a frown.

The figure stood for a moment, immovable, with folded arms, looking fixedly upon the chevalier Fadasse, without a word. Then he slowly raised an arm, stretched it forth, waved it, and dropped it again into his former position.

At this signal six men stepped forward from behind a hedge, which formed one of the boundaries of the orchard. They ranged themselves three on each side of the chevalier, and then stood stock still; awaiting as it seemed the bidding of him who had summoned them. Then the mask produced something from beneath his cloak; and before the chevalier was aware of his purpose, advanced briskly upon him, and whipped the something over his head and ears; by which means the chevalier found himself blindfolded. He raised his hands hastily, endeavouring to snatch off this something; but he found it to be a kind of iron head-piece, securely fastened by springs, impossible to undo.

He uttered some violent exclamations; but they were totally unheeded. He could hear a sound of horses' feet, surrounding him; and presently he felt himself lifted up in the arms of the six. They forced him into the saddle, and held him there, three on each side.

Feeling his utter helplessness, he made up his mind to submit; resolving to shout an appeal to any passengers they might chance to meet.

Presently he found the horses put in motion; and himself riding on between the six. He tried to form some conjecture of the road they were taking, but there was nothing which could

guide him to any definite conclusion. After what must have been a some hours' ride they came to a halt. He could feel that the horse he rode, was checked by another hand than his own; then some food was held to his mouth, and the monosyllable, "Eat!" was pronounced. He listened keenly to the voice, that he might learn whether it was one known to him; but it struck him even in the utterance of that single sound to be a feigned one.

"I care not to eat;" he said.

A can was proffered at his lips, and the same voice exclaimed: —"Drink!"

"Nor to drink;" he rejoined. But he thought that this halt for refreshment betokened an inn; and he called out suddenly and lustily, "Hallo! House! Within there! Is there any one at hand, willing to help a gentleman betrayed by rascals?"

But no sound replied, save the echo of his own words, which rang loudly out, and then died away. Soon after, they resumed their journey; and at length, the whole party came once more to a halt. This time they all dismounted: and then, the six gathered about him, three on each side, and assisted him out of the saddle. He felt them lead him by the arms, up some steps; a door seemed to open; he heard the door close behind him, some bolts drawn and other sounds of fastening, which fell heavily on his ear, as denoting incarceration. He prepared himself for some dark dungeon, for solitude, for bread and water, for all the usual horrors of captivity. What then was his surprise, when the mask, unfastening the iron head-piece, enabled him to see the place in which he really was. His eyes, long blindfolded, could scarce encounter the blaze of light which burst upon them; and at first he could distinguish nothing clearly. Gradually he could perceive that he was in a spacious apartment, hung entirely with rich silk hangings; at regular distances, chased silver sconces projected from the walls, bearing branches of wax-lights; a huge candelabrum of the same metal depended from the ceiling. In the centre of the apartment stood a table, spread with delicacies, and laid with covers for three persons. As he observed this last circumstance, the

chevalier Fadasse could not help wondering what sort of fellow-prisoners were to be his—if fellow-prisoners they were.

The masked man had withdrawn; but the six advanced, made some final arrangements in the disposal of the supper-table, and then stood waiting. There was a short pause. Then, a portion of the hangings at the other end of the room was drawn aside, and disclosed a door, through which presently appeared two veiled ladies.

"O ho!" thought the chevalier, "a gallant adventure! That's quite another affair. I am now in my element. Fadasse, my dear fellow, thou art at home and at ease, now! See that thou carry'st thyself with thy usual address in such circumstances. Allons!"

He approached the veiled figures, addressing them with some high-flown compliment. They each made him a profound curtsey; and then motioned him to take the head of the table, while they seated themselves on either side. He hastened to do the honours of the banquet, by carving, and by helping each of the ladies to some of the dainties spread there in such tempting luxuriance; for he remembered that in eating the veils must be raised; and he was dying with curiosity to behold the faces which must needs belong to such figures of grace and beauty. He passes to each her plate, and she bows graciously, as it is placed before her. He watches them keenly. A small white hand is raised by the lady on his right; whom he distinguishes from the other, by observing that she is the taller of the two. The lady on his left also raises a fair hand; but in lieu of putting back their veils, they merely lift the plate from before them, and give it to the one of the six who is standing behind their respective chairs.

"Fair ladies, you use me barbarously to decline eating with me. You first deign me the beatitude of your presence to cheer my solitary meal; and then you disdain to share it. How may I know the cates are not poisoned, if you forbear to taste them?"

At a signal from the lady on his right, one of the six—who seem automatons rather than men, so like machines do they move and act—places another cover at the opposite end of the

table; sets a chair; disappears for a moment; and then returns, bringing back with him the masked man, who takes the seat opposite to Fadasse, bowing low, and laying his hand on his heart. The chevalier can no longer complain of any lack of zeal in the performance of the part of taster. The new-comer fulfils his office with such right goodwill, that he swallows enough for three—the ladies and himself.

He also goes through all the duties of hospitality,—even of joviality,—with great diligence, though in dumb-show. He pledges the chevalier with evident (though silent) cordiality, when he drinks, which is not seldom, or in stinted draughts. He passes towards him the bottle, with earnest (though mute) signs that he should help himself. He lolls back, after the meal, in a careless, picktooth kind of way, and now and then, while playing with a little dessert-fruit, has the air of interchanging some light after-dinner remark, so perfect is the pantomime with which he plays his part of entertainer.

There is something in this self-possessed enactment of the host, on the part of the mask, which the chevalier feels to be peculiarly provoking. He addresses himself, therefore, once more, to the veiled ladies.

"Fair creatures," he said, "indeed you treat me ill. You set me down to a feast, it is true; but you deny me that which makes the charm of a feast,—festive intercourse; which gives zest to the viands, flavour to the wines! What companionship is there in silence? Call it churlishness rather. As well drink alone, as drain none but mutely-pledged wine-cups."

"You shall not deem us churls, sir chevalier;" said the mask. "Rather than you shall have just cause of complaint, in being compelled to the imbibing of unsocial draughts, myself will be your boon companion; a man, as it seemeth me, more fitly fills that office than a lady."

"And yet poets have told us ere now, that women and wine combine for man's delight;" said the chevalier.

"Trust me, they are but scurvy poets—rascal poetasters, rather—who desecrate beauty by associating its inspiration with that of the goblet;" said the mask.

"But Jove the omnipotent had the good taste to make

the budding vernal Hebe his cup-bearer;" answered the chevalier.

"Jove, good sir, was Jove,—king of gods and men. It behoves us petty mortals take heed how we rashly challenge comparison with the Thunderer, or ape his doings. Moreover, sir, bully Jove repaired his uncourteous blunder, by taking Tros's son to be his tapster, when he saw his error of turning the goddess of Spring into a barmaid."

"May I crave your worship's name, since you favour me with your converse, sir?" rejoined the chevalier.

"Far be it from me to limit your desires, sir;" replied the mask. "Know me, sir chevalier, for your friend, Pierre La Touche."

There was nothing in this name that reminded Fadasse of any one he had ever known.

"Good monsieur Pierre La Touche," he said, "I am beholden to your courtesy. May I farther own myself its debtor, by your informing me the names of these fair ladies?"

"I would fain oblige you, sir. But, for all that regards those fair enigmas," said the mask, bowing, and placing his hand on his heart, "I must refer you solely to themselves."

"Fair Cruelty, fair Rigour," said the chevalier, bowing to the ladies as they rose from table, "for so must I distinguish you, until you deign to acquaint me with your truer, because softer, names, I wish you the undisturbed sleep, which may not be mine while you remain inflexible to my prayers."

The two veiled ladies made a profound reverence; and withdrew through the small door at the farther end of the apartment, followed by the mask, and four of the six automatons. The two who remained, lifted up the hangings opposite, and discovered another door, which they threw open; inviting him, by a gesture, to enter. He did so, and found a luxurious sleeping-apartment, no less superbly hung and adorned, than the saloon where he had supped. He was sufficiently wearied by his long ride, to hail the prospect of repose with eagerness; and he slept long and soundly. When he awoke, he was surprised to see the moon-like lamps with which the bed-chamber was hung, still burning. He felt re-

freshed and wakeful, and had all the sensations of one who has slept for many hours; yet no sign of morning could he discern; so, believing that he must have been mistaken in the lapse of time, he turned round and went to sleep again. It was but a short doze. He felt that it *must* be morning.

"I forgot those thick hangings; they exclude the light, doubtless;" thought he, as he leaped out of bed, and drew back the heavy crimson drapery. There was a window-space! but no window, visible; the shutters were closely shut and fastened. He hastily opened the door which led into the other apartment; but found the same blaze of light there, as when he had first entered it. The sconces had been replenished with wax-candles; and the candelabrum that hung from the centre of the ceiling, also. He drew back a portion of the hangings. There was a window; but close-shuttered and fastened. He found another, and still another; but all were alike impervious to the day-light, and impossible to undo. He tried to find the door through which the ladies had made their appearance. He found it readily; but it was fast locked. He searched for the one through which he thought he himself must have entered; and which seemed to be at the other end of the saloon. He found that likewise; but it was immovably barred and bolted.

He noticed that the table had been cleared of the previous meal; and that it was now laid as if for breakfast. He observed too, that it was laid but for one person.

"Corbleu!" he exclaimed, "they intend carrying on this farce of disdain yet awhile longer. 'Tis a shallow pretence, a poor affectation that cannot deceive me. Allons! 'twill not last long."

Smiling, and confident, he went through the rites of morning-toilette; taking, if possible, more than ordinary care in the adornment of his person. When he once more came forth into the saloon, the six automatons entered, bringing hot chocolate and other such requisites for making the first meal of the day, as were at that time almost exclusively confined to royalty, or the highest nobility.

After breakfast, they cleared the table, and withdrew.

The chevalier was seized with a fit of yawning. He cast his

eyes round the room, wishing that among its rich adornments, mirrors had not been omitted. He strolled into the bed-room, and amused himself for a time with the toilette-glass; twisting and coaxing his whiskers; smoothing his moustaches; paring and trimming his nails, re-arranging his rings and other ornaments. But even the most interesting employments will pall, at last; and he sauntered back into the saloon. In one corner, to his great joy, he found a merelle-table, a chess-board, dice, and a pack of cards. In a recess opposite, a lute, a viola, a viol-de-gamba, and a few other musical instruments. With these he entertained himself for some hours; until, just as he was beginning to think it must be dinner-time, in came the six, and began to spread the centre table.

In this manner, he now went on. He could form no idea of the lapse of time. Whether the moon and stars were then shining, or whether the sun were high in the heavens, he had not the remotest means of judging. The same blaze of wax-lights from the candelabra and sconces in the saloon; the same tempered radiance from the lamps, in the sleeping-room, kept him in total darkness,—as to the progress of time. Once, a sudden light, (of conjecture) broke upon him.

"Aha!" thought he, "my kidnapping was not enough; my detention here was not sufficient! It is requisite that I should be kept in ignorance of the passing of time, that I may not know when the thirtieth of the month arrives; that I may be absent, nowhere to be found, on that day; that I may be made involuntarily to break my engagement with Raoul on that day; that I may not be married to his sister, in short, on that day! Pardie! The pretty rogues have laid their plans well! But which one of them is it, I marvel, who has so set her heart upon having me? I would give this diamond solitaire to know! They are fascinating creatures, 'tis true; still I cannot be false to my poor little Flora, even for their sakes. Methinks, I long to see them again, if it be but to disabuse them of their fatal error."

But many breakfasts, many dinners, and many suppers succeeded to each other, ere his wish was gratified. At length, he perceived that the six prepared the supper-table,—for three persons, as on his first arrival.

As before, also, the two veiled ladies made their appearance through the same small door; and, with a profound curtsey to the chevalier Fadasse, took their seats at the table, while they entreated him, by a courteous gesture, to take his.

"Fair ladies," he began, "it is but right, that you should be informed of one thing. It is grievous to me to be compelled to give fair ones like yourselves the pain of knowing your love is placed on one who never can return it in honourable kind. But I must be frank. I can marry neither of you. I am promised, bound to another; and to her I must preserve my fidelity."

Both the ladies gave unmistakeable evidence of being violently shaken by emotion of some kind. He thought them weeping; and hastened to console them.

"My heart is saddened, oppressed, by the sight of your grief, lovely ones!" he said; "would that it were in my power to assuage it! But Fate has willed otherwise! Take courage, dear ladies! Be comforted. Believe that I pity, though I cannot marry you!"

The ladies drew forth their handkerchiefs; and beneath their veils, the chevalier could perceive them wiping away the irrepressible tears; then they abruptly arose; cast themselves for a moment into each other's arms; and withdrew in a burst of uncontrollable agitation.

"Poor souls! Poor dear souls!" he murmured compassionately. "My heart bleeds to behold their agony. But it was my duty; and I have performed it. Let that be my consolation." He helped himself to a glass of Tokay, and drank it off; gave a deep sigh; poured out another glassful; and after swallowing that, ejaculated:—"Allons; I will now hope that I may be detained no longer from the fulfilment of my promise to Raoul and the beautiful Flora. I trust I may yet be in time. I wonder what the day of the month is?"

But many more breakfasts, dinners, suppers, followed each other ere he was gratified in his hope of release. At length, after one of these breakfasts, just as he was about to engage in a game at merelles, with as much of excitement and entertainment as could be derived from a match against himself, he saw

the mask enter, accompanied by the six; who, as usual, looked like wooden figures moving on springs. He stepped briskly forward, and placed the iron blindfolding once more over Fadasse's head.

He felt the six gather round him. He heard the door unbarred and unbolted. He found himself led forward.

The six hurried him on; mounted him; got into their own saddles; and soon the whole party were riding in the same order as formerly.

There was the same long journey; and, at length, came the halt, the dismounting, and the final withdrawing of the iron head-piece.

The chevalier Fadasse looked hastily round. He was in his own grounds again; on the exact spot where he had been walking when these men first accosted him. They were now scouring off, with the led horse upon which he had himself ridden, between them. Last, went the mask, bringing up the rear of the party.

"Villain Pierre! Rascal mask! Scoundrel La Touche!" shouted the infuriated chevalier; "be assured I shall live to have my revenge of thee for this foul trick!"

"I have already lived to have mine for the many thou play'dst me, master Fadasse, once upon a time!" laughed the mask, in his natural tone, as he scampered away; and was soon, with his companions, out of sight.

"Peste!" cried the chevalier, "'tis no other than that truant imp, the old jester's son! Who should have dreamed of his turning up again at Chateau Fadasse? A murrain on the varlet's impudence! But who can those ladies be, in whose service he hath employment? That two roguish women, and a discarded page-jester should outwit me! Malédiction!"

He bit his lip, and stood plunged in vexed meditation. He stood there the conscious victim of some knavish trick, some arch piece of dupery, expressly played off to torment him.

A serving-man crossed the court, and approached the orchard.

"Hallo! Sirrah Jacquot! Come hither!"

"My young master!"

The servant was about to hurry away again, to carry the news of the chevalier's return to his father; when Fadasse called him back. "Before another word, tell me what the day of the month is;" he said.

"Good lack, master! Why, the fifth, sure."

"The fifth! Then the thirtieth is past and gone!"

"The thirtieth! Of course it is;—of last month."

The chevalier Fadasse uttered an imprecation; but stayed to question no more. He hurried to his stable; bade one of the grooms saddle his horse; and rode off at full speed in the direction of La Vallée.

It was many miles' distance; and he did not arrive at the mansion until too late an hour to seek an interview with Raoul. He entered a lodge to the park; which, fortunately for him, was inhabited by an old woman, not only inclined to be hospitable, but communicative. She told him that there had been a terrible 'tripotage' about mademoiselle Flora, who had vowed, poor lamb, not to marry some rich abomination of a man whom her tyrant brother had insisted upon her having, instead of that charming monsieur Victor, whom every body loved. That then her 'vilain loup' of a brother had shut her up in the turret-room, swearing a horrible oath that she should not be let out until the 'abomination' of a 'prétendu' came to marry her. That the 'poor lamb' had pined and pined in her solitary confinement. That the chapel had been re-decorated; the saloons newly hung; the house generally made gay, against the expected wedding. That each day the Count de Beaupré had been heard to express fresh impatience and wonder at the non-arrival of the bridegroom. That at length the fated thirtieth had dawned; but still no bridegroom,—that is, no 'abomination' of a bridegroom. But in his stead, who should make his appearance but Victor St. André the first lover, come to claim his betrothed wife. That then certain facts had transpired. How that Raoul's oath had specified a clause, in favour of which, Flora, if not wedded on the last day of the month to the 'abomination,' was free to marry him to whom she had been originally promised. That the 'loup,' full of sullen ire against the truant 'abomination,' had given a grim consent to the nup-

'tials of his sister with the man of her choice, and that they had actually taken place on the very same day which was to have seen the 'poor lamb' united to the detested 'prétendu.'

The old crone went on to say, that the young couple were no sooner joined, than they were separated; for that immediately after the ceremony, Victor St. André had been compelled to quit his new-made wife. He had obtained leave of absence from his regiment but for a few hours. He went, leaving the 'poor lamb' still within the power of the 'vilain loup' of a brother; who, as soon as Victor St. André was gone again, resumed his old tyranny. There had been nothing but a succession of 'tripotages' since, the old woman said. Until at length, on that very yesterday, it was discovered that mademoiselle Flora, 'poor lamb,' was missing. She had fled from her brother's house, no one knew whither; and Raoul, half in rage, half in affright, had taken horse, and set off from La Vallée to seek her.

Fadasse now saw plainly that he had been made the object of a well-concerted scheme to keep him out of the way until the period of Raoul's rash vow should have elapsed; thus affording an opportunity to Flora of effecting the only means of escape in her power.

He resolved therefore, that he would altogether avoid the vexatious reminiscence of these late circumstances, by leaving the scene of their occurrence; and accordingly set out upon a journey into Spain, to try what travel and change of scene would do towards obliterating the memory of these mortifications.

Rosalind and Celia were spending a pleasant season of retirement at their country palace of Beaulieu.

One bright spring morning the two were pacing up and down the broad terrace-walk, thus conversing:—

"Ay, 'tis all well ended, so far;" said Celia. "Flora's hasty letter brought me word that her marriage had happily and surely taken place. But this compelled separation from her young husband—now her proper protector; this inevitable return to the guardianship of her unnatural brother, fills me with fears for her."

"Let us rather content ourselves that she is safe married to the man she prefers, and safe from marriage with the man she abhors," said Rosalind, laughing. "Poor Fadasse! How chivalrously he sought to protect us from our own weak hearts! But I would wager that had the two veiled fair ones not kept him at such arm's length as they did—he would have indulged their foible for his sweet person. Out upon the conceited coxcomb!"

"My sport in the device was, to see how the fool had the wit to pay off old scores, by treating his former tyrant as his puppet;" said Celia. "Touchstone as the masked man, matched the chevalier for making him, as a boy, his foot-ball."

As Celia finished speaking, she found herself suddenly in the arms of some one, who clasped her close, and imprinted several kisses, in rapid succession, upon her lips.

She struggled to free herself; and to her indignation perceived that it was a strange youth, who had burst from a thick-pleached arbour at one end of the terrace, and whom, at first, she did not recognize.

"How now, young sir! What ruffian behaviour is this?" she exclaimed.

Rosalind said laughingly:—"Do you not know him, coz? Do you not perceive it is Theodore, Flora's cousin?"

"I know not how that entitles him to assail me thus;" said Celia, with a sparkling eye, and a tone that showed she was much hurt and offended.

"Cast thy glance upon him once more, ere thou pour forth all the vials of thy virtuous wrath upon the poor youth's head;" said Rosalind, still laughing. "See here, what think'st thou of this, as a warrant for the innocence of his assault?"

Celia saw her cousin draw down from among the short black clusters of hair which peeped beneath Theodore's broad hat, a long bright golden ringlet. Rosalind drew it to its full shining length, in a sort of smiling triumph of proof; then let it go; and as it sprang up from her finger and thumb, in a wavy elastic curl against its owner's glowing cheek, it proclaimed that owner a very woman,—Flora de Beaupré herself.

"Dear Flora! you here! in this dress! How came you

hither? How came Rose to know of your presence—of your disguise?"

"I contrived to let her into my secret first, in order that we might try its effect upon you securely. For it is of all importance, that my disguise should be unsuspected, as I am about to take shelter with you, until my husband returns to take me to my future home."

"With what a pretty air of wifely pride doth she talk of 'my husband,' and 'my future home!'" said Celia, looking at her with a loving smile.

"But will you harbour me till I can claim them with as open a pride, as I now may show to you alone, dear friends?" said the blushing Flora.

"You know how right willing we shall be to have you with us;" answered they.

"I do know it; and in this happy confidence, I made my plans. I bethought me of taking refuge with you; but I knew that your father, Celia, might object to his daughter openly receiving at court a runaway. Could I conceal my identity for a time, and remain with you quietly here at Beaulieu, I might be safe until Victor's return. I therefore provided myself with one of my cousin's suits; stained my eyebrows black; and by good fortune found a peruke of the same hue, which had once at a masked ball, served my mother. Thus disguised, I stole away from La Vallée under shadow of night. I was fortunate enough to stumble on your faithful follower, Touchstone; him I begged to take my message to Rosalind, who welcomed me warmly, and afterwards stationed me in this close arbour, whence I might steal out as Theodore, and take you by surprise in the graceless style I did. Forgive me the alarm I caused your modesty, in consideration of the assurance it gives us, that my disguise is beyond suspicion perfect."

"Thou art a dear fellow; and as proof I forgive thee thy saucy attack, I give thee this embrace of mine own accord;" said Celia, giving Flora a hearty hug as she spoke.

At Beaulieu the three ladies spent some pleasant time together. Flora would have been quite happy with her young

friends; had it not been for her anxiety respecting Victor, of whom she heard no direct tidings. Rumours of continually recurring engagements between the two armies, occasionally reached her retreat; but no certain news. She secretly fretted; but she rallied, before her friends; she assumed the indifference of resentment; she tried to speak as if she felt only a growing coolness towards him, in return for his neglect in first leaving her, and then continuing silent during his absence.

"Beware how you let your anger make you unjust as well as bitter, dear Flora;" said Celia. "Think if you can recall one instance wherein Victor spoke otherwise than truly, acted otherwise than nobly. We should judge friends in absence by what we know of them, not by what we hear of them."

"He had the gift of seeming true and noble; but how know I, he was what he seemed!" said Flora, with a vain struggle to speak without faltering.

"Here are some unseemly drops gemming your worship's vest;" said Rosalind, pointing to the tears which fell fast and thick upon the front of Theodore's doublet. "What, man! let not your woman's eyes rain their own betrayal."

"They are tears of anger, not of weakness. Do not think they spring from a tenderness unworthy a forsaken wife. If Victor desire to forget me, I will show that I can forget him. I would not see him if he came hither."

Touchstone entered as Madame St. André expressed herself thus peremptorily on the subject of declining to see her husband should he come to Beaulieu. He had his own secret opinion on the matter; but he merely said drily: "I understand, Sir madam, that you would be adamant, in case your husband besought you to hear him. 'Tis well that I forbade him the house, when he would fain have paid you a visit but now."

"How say'st thou? 'But now!' Hast thou seen him, good fellow?" gasped Flora.

"A goodly adamantine aspen-leaf;" cried Celia laying her hand upon the trembling Flora's sleeve; "but sit thee down in yonder corner, and recall some of thy firm resolves, to harden thee against aught that may bechance."

"Victor here! you jest, man;" said Rosalind to Touchstone.

"As a jester should, madam."

"Nay, nay, leave thy quips now, and let us have sober verity."

"In sober verity, then, he is here. Behold him!"

Rosalind approached one of the open windows.

"I pray you, walk in, sir. My cousin Celia and I have been sitting here in the twilight, with a young friend of ours; but by your leave, we can continue our converse by starlight, rather than have it interrupted by the attendants."

"It best suits my condition, which must shun curious eyes, for I have stolen hither to obtain, if possible, traces of my Flora. A rumour suddenly reached me that she had quitted La Vallée, that she has fled, no one knows whither. You, dear lady, who are one of the two friends dearest to her, can surely inform me if this terrible news be true."

"Why did you not stay to see after your wife yourself, good sir, instead of leaving the task of caring for her to others," said a person who had hitherto remained in the shadow of the apartment.

"That voice!" exclaimed Victor in sudden amazement.

"Ay, that voice, good sir; the voice of Theodore; which probably strikes upon your conscience, from its likeness to that of its cousin, the woman whom you left after an hour's marriage."

"I forgive your rudeness to myself," said Victor; "for the sake of the affection it notes towards my wife; but in pity to my anxiety, dear ladies, let me know all you know of my Flora—my wife."

"How know you that your desertion may not have extinguished love in her heart for you?" continued the voice from the dark. "Mayhap, in the absence of the neglectful husband, some brisker gallant hath persuaded her to bestow upon him that which Victor St. André held not worth the having. Peradventure, her flight is in company with this gallant, whosoever he may be."

"You shall not malign my wife unpunished!" angrily exclaimed Victor. "Come forth into the park with me, young

sir; these ladies shall not protect you by their presence, from the chastisement due to so shameless a tongue."

"You would fain kill her cousin because he tells you your own desertion has made her a false wife."

"That voice, so like hers, unmans me," muttered St. André. Then in a sort of fierce rallying of his determination, he half drew his sword, repeating "Come! Follow me, young sir!"

But at the first glimpse of the blade, the seeming Theodore sprang forward, and clinging to his arm, exclaimed—"Don't hurt me, Victor!"

"Coward, as well as slanderer?" he cried, and was about to push the youth off; when Rosalind stepped forward, twitched away the black clusters of hair, and revealed the fair ringlets of Flora, exclaiming:—

"Have a care, master Victor, lest in your roughness to Theodore, you injure Flora!"

"Flora! my wife!"

"Victor! dear husband!"

"Let us leave this foolish pair to fight out the rest of their quarrel after their own fashion;" said Rosalind, leading Celia away. "Clubs won't part them now."

On the following morning, the happy party of four friends were all walking on the terrace together; Victor trying to assert his marital authority, in forbidding his wife to think of carrying out a resolution she had formed, of accompanying him to the army as his page, rather than again be separated from him.

Just then, a man on horseback rode up the park approach, towards the house; but seeing the group on the terrace, he made his way across the sward in their direction.

"It is a soldier! He has seen you, Victor! We are lost!" said Flora.

"Fear nothing, love; I told the general where he might hear of me, in case he should desire to summon me."

Flora's cheek grew paler and paler, as she saw the horseman deliver into her husband's hand the missive which was to call him from her; but she strove to be collected and firm, while eagerly perusing his face, as he read the letter.

To her surprise she saw joy sparkle in his eyes.

"Dear Flora! See here! Read this!" he exclaimed. "We need not part. Henceforth, my honour, my duty, are one with my delight. They alike call me to my home with you."

The general's letter congratulated Victor on an amnesty which had just been ratified between the long-contending armies. He bade him take his new-made wife in triumph to St. André; and there joyfully to celebrate the proclaimed peace, by proving himself as good and happy a citizen in this period of the realm's tranquillity, as he had hitherto shown himself to be a brave and faithful champion in its time of war.

When their friends, Victor and Flora, quitted them for St. André, Rosalind and Celia also left Beaulieu, and returned to court.

About this time, Rosalind had her thoughts much drawn again towards her father. She learned where he had taken up his abode; she found it was the pleasant forest of Arden that he had chosen to make the scene of his exile; she heard of the cheerful philosophy, the happy serenity which had become his, in this charming spot; she heard how he drew inspiriting lessons from everything that surrounded him in this woodland life of peace and contentment. She heard too, that many more of his friends had lately joined him; that several lords had voluntarily banished themselves to bear him company. His faithful cousin Amiens was, of course, still with him. All this was of sweet comfort to her; and yet she could not but occasionally suffer her heart to sink a little, as she felt the natural longing of a child to be with her father, that she might give him her loving care, and make him and herself happy in their mutual affection.

Her uncle treated her very kindly, although his feelings towards her were of a mingled complexion. He loved her for her own sake; he could appreciate her brilliant qualities; he also liked her for his daughter's sake, who he knew tendered her no less dearly than her very self: but there lurked, besides, a sort of jealousy of the people's commendation of her many virtues and excellencies, and a kind of uneasy association of

her presence with the injustice he had done her absent father. Nevertheless, the prepossession had hitherto prevailed over the distrust; which lay smothered until some occasion might arise which should call it forth into an open evidence of displeasure against her.

The friendship between herself and Celia, had even increased with their growth, and strengthened with their added years. They were sisters in heart. Celia, in her generosity of soul, saw that in Rosalind's mind, which she delighted in, as something she gladly confessed superior to her own powers of wit and fancy; while Rosalind beheld in the affectionate gentleness of Celia's nature, that which she reverenced as above even intellectual gifts. The perfection of feminine attachment was theirs.

But it was under the impress of a passing shadow of regret concerning her father, that Rosalind, one day, seeming less gay than was her wont, caused Celia to say:—"*I pray thee, sweet my coz, be merry.*"

To which Rosalind answered:—"*Dear Celia, I show more mirth than I am mistress of; and would you yet I were merrier? Unless you could teach me to forget a banished father, you must not learn me how to remember any extraordinary pleasure.*"

AS YOU LIKE IT, Act. i. Sc. 2.

TALE X.

JULIET; THE WHITE DOVE OF VERONA.

IT was Lammas-eve. The breath of early August hung hot and sultry upon the scene. Not a leaf or a blossom stirred. The flowers in the garden, the fruit on the orchard trees, yielded their incense to enrich its heavy-perfumed volume. The mingled scents of carnations, with their clove aroma; of fragrant jessamine, of delicious orange-blossom; the faint languor of lilies, the matchless luxuriance of roses, the honeyed sweetness of woodbine; together with the fruity opulence of peach, nectarine, and mulberry, the musky smell from fig-tree and vine, and the redolence of the grape-clusters themselves, exhaled a steam of spicery that seemed to add voluptuous weight to the torpid atmosphere, which hung close, oppressive, motionless; laden with odorous vapours. There was a hush, a pause, as of a mighty suspended breath. Within the Verona garden, on the branch of a pomegranate tree,—deep-nestled amid its profusion of scarlet blossoms,—sat a pair of snow-white doves; their grain-like beaks joined in that close-wrestling kiss of their tribe, nearest allied in its pretty prerogative to the human caress.

All seemed preternaturally still. The sky looked dense, for all its glow of azure and golden light. There were masses of sullen clouds, in the horizon, purple, crimson, gorgeous and sluggish, amid copper and emerald-hued back-grounds; bright bars and edges of dazzling splendour, were crossed and interwoven with broad flushes of rose colour, that stretched up athwart the heavens. The distant mountains looked of a deep violet; dark, yet sharply defined against the leaden murkiness

of the sky, in the quarter away from the westering sun. There was a sinister beauty in all; in the rich colours of the firmament, as in the voluptuous stillness of the atmosphere.

Thunder muttered, low and remote, its solemn music; sternly tremulous, it seemed to usher in reluctant doom. A few heavy drops fell,—Nature's tears for fate decreed. As closed the beauty of this fair Italian summer evening in storm and devastation, so was to end the ill-starred pair of Italian lovers' brief joys, in despair, destruction, death. Yet, like the beauty of Italian summers, renewed with the returning sun, the love of those Italian lovers shall endure in immortal light, casting into shadow the transitory darkness of their early grave. So long as the sun of Italy and the world shall shine, Italy and the world will cherish the memory of that Italian love-story, the love-story of the World.

Sudden, in the very midst of the slum'brous pause, a vivid flash, accompanied by a burst of thunder, rent the air. The birds were smitten from the tree; their snowy feathers scattered to the ground; the rain poured forth its torrents; the trees bent and waved beneath the fury of the electric wind, which sprang up in abrupt and violent gusts, hurling all to and fro in agitation and tumult, where late had been naught but mute repose; the heads of the flowers were cast to the earth, smirched and torn; the leaves were swept from the boughs, and whirled away; the mould of the beds, the gravel of the paths, were snatched up by the violence of the rain; the lightning flung its scathing glare abroad and afar; and the thunder rolled with scarce any intermission.

But at the moment the bolt fell, which struck the two white doves, a little human dove fluttered into existence,—drawing its first panting breath in this world of passionate emotion. Juliet was born.

The birth of this child was the subject of great rejoicing to the house of Capulet. Her father was, by direct descent, and by wealth, the chief representative of this one of Verona's most illustrious families. He had been anxious for an heir, to perpetuate its dignity; and though he was a little disappointed,

when the child proved to be a girl, yet he consoled himself with an heiress rather than with no descendant at all. The infant Juliet was consigned to the care of a wet-nurse; while, as soon as lady Capulet herself could bear the journey, her husband took her on a visit of a few months, to some old friends, who resided on their estate near Mantua.

It was a charming spot; its owners were pleasant people; in such a scene, and in such society, Lady Capulet regained health and spirits, with renewed strength of body; but she suffered a relapse of an old mental malady of hers, jealousy. Their host and hostess had an only daughter, named Leonilda. She was a gay, light-hearted creature, the treasure of her doting parents, and the delight of all who knew her.

Capulet had known her from earliest childhood, and loved her fondly as though she were still a child; but instead of this mutual liking appearing as it was, the simple affection between a light-hearted girl, and a lively-tempered man, whose manners suited each other, to lady Capulet's jaundiced eyes, it seemed the powerful attachment which springs up irresistibly between assimilating natures. And she allowed her thoughts to toss and struggle in the perpetual unrest of jealous surmise.

Meanwhile time insensibly crept on. Both father and mother longed to see their little girl, who hitherto had dwelt at the farm-house, with her foster-parents, tenants of the Capulet family. The farmer was a hearty, jocular, good soul, well-nigh as fond of the little daughter of his feudal lord, as of his own bantling; while his wife vowed there was not a pin to choose betwixt them, which was dearest to her, lady-bird Juliet, or baby Susan.

"May-be, our Susan is the best little good thing in her temper, whilst my pretty lamb here, is the sweetest innocent in her pets and her tempers;" said the nurse to her good man, who was busy near his wife, trimming and training some stray branches of a vine that grew against the wall, near to which she was sitting, with one babe on her lap, and the other at her feet.

"How mean'st thou, wife? Like a true woman, thou muddl'st thy kindly meaning with untoward speech. What

wouldst thou say of our good little Susan's temper, and pretty Jule's tempers?"

"Marry, all the world trows that temper and tempers are two. Susan hath an angel's temper for honey-sweet goodness. She's a good little soul, is our Susan; but Jule's a dear lambkin of pretty wilfulness."

"Ay, by my holidam, that she is!" quoth the farmer, staying his hand from his work, to watch the little humours of the child, as his wife played with it, pretendedly teasing and thwarting it. As he turned again towards his work, he saw the wall heave, give a lurch, and recede from the twigs he was preparing to nail against it. At the same moment, through the still air, came a deep sound, inexpressibly awful in its hidden menace. The farmer cast his eye up towards the blue sky. No signal of storm was there. It was not thunder. Then the dove-house swayed to and fro—the birds flew wildly hither and thither—the ground shook, with a vast tremble—trees waved, and bent their tops, as beneath a mighty wind, though no breath of air was stirring—and again was heard that grave subterranean murmur. "Away, wife! Away!" cried the farmer; "make the best of thy way to the field yonder. Go not near the house. Away! The earthquake! Trudge, quick as thou canst to the open field with my lord's babe, while I follow thee with our own. Where's Susan? Mother of heaven! the child has waddled away out of ken. No, there she is, 'mongst the vine-leaves. Begone you, wife; I'll fetch our Susan. Away with ye! Trudge, trudge, woman, for dear life!"

The nurse fled, with the child in her arms. The next instant, down came the dove-cote with a crash; and in another moment, as the farmer ran to snatch up his little one, the vine-covered wall tottered, was split and rent asunder, and falling, buried both father and child beneath its ruins.

Next day, when the lord Capulet and his wife arrived, they found the little Juliet safe; and their first care, in gratitude towards her who had been the means of the child's preservation, was to remove the nurse from the farm, and instal her in their own household, making it her future home. In the pride of being at the great house, in the constant dwelling beside her

foster-child, the nurse found consolation for all that she had lost. But no sooner had lady Capulet's anxiety respecting her child been allayed, than her mind reverted to the subject that usually engrossed it.

Capulet went to Mantua. Again he went; and again; and yet again. These repeated visits tortured his wife into full credence of all she had feared. Yet she allowed not one symptom of jealousy to escape her. She suffered in silence.

Once, she was brooding on this void in her existence, and she could not refrain from shedding tears. Her little girl was at her feet, playing with some chestnuts, that Tybalt had collected for the child's amusement, to roll about the floor, and scramble after. For Juliet could run about well, now; and the boy was very fond of his pretty gentle little cousin, who, in turn, had taken a great fancy to him.

The sight of her mother weeping, caught the child's attention, and she paused in her sport.

"What are you crying for, mammina? Has any one else hurt you? Let me kiss the place."

"No one has hurt me, foolish little tender heart;" said lady Capulet. "Who should hurt me?"

"Who indeed?" echoed Tybalt. "I should like to see the man who would dare to hurt or offend you. Boy as I am, I'd teach him better manners."

"Why, what wouldst thou do, by way of lesson to one who should injure me, young cousin?" she said, with a smile. "Thou art yet too slight to think of coping with a grown man, should such a one offer me wrong."

"Skilful fencing masters many a tall fellow;" said the youth; "and I practise evermore, that I may get perfect command over my weapon. But there are other ways," added he, nodding his head with an air at once mysterious and confident.

"Indeed! and what may they be?" asked lady Capulet.

She was startled, when he promptly replied, "Poison."

"What talk'st thou of poison, boy? Dost thou know how fearfully it sounds in thy young mouth?" said lady Capulet, lowering her voice beyond hearing of the child, Juliet.

"Never too young to consider means of avenging insult;"

replied the stripling, with one of his haughty looks. "Long ago,—before I came to Verona,—an old man, a neighbour of ours, gave my father a curious poison, as a valuable matter, which might one day stand him in good stead. He told him it was so subtle, that a few grains of it laid in a glove, would make that glove a deadly gift to its wearer. The safety, the unsuspected security, thus afforded of putting an enemy to death, gave the value, he said, to the gift. They did not know I overheard them, but I did; and when my father died, I, as his rightful heir, took possession of the only thing of worth he had."

"But it is not fit, boy, thou shouldst possess means of such deadly potency, within thine own discretion;" said lady Capulet. "Give the poison into my keeping. Best not trust thyself with such fatal temptation to evil."

"Willingly; I have no farther use for it. Henceforth, I trust to mine arm as my sole avenger. You may make sure of my never using it, by throwing it away yourself."

Well had it been for the lady, had she immediately done so. The words she used to her nephew, were applicable to herself. 'Best not trust thyself with such fatal temptation to evil.' But when once the poison came into her possession, she contented herself with carefully locking it up in a cabinet in her own room, thinking it was out of harm's way, now that it was beyond the power of a rash boy. She never reflected that it was within the reach of a desperate woman—a woman made desperate at moments by the passion of jealousy.

Some time after this, it happened that there was a fashion,—a sort of rage,—for a peculiar light-coloured glove. They were worn by all ladies who pretended to taste and distinction. They were presented in half-dozen pairs by gallants to their mistresses. They were called Cleopatra gloves; and were of a pale tint, supposed to be that of the waters of the Nile. In short, they were just that sort of elegant trifle, which constitute a necessity, while the 'furore' lasts, in circles where luxury and fashion dictate laws.

Capulet one morning brought several pairs of these gloves as a present to his wife. She, charmed with the attention from him, received them with gracious words of delighted acceptance.

But all her pleasure was marred, when he added:—"By the way, I think of riding over to Mantua next week, what say you to sending a share of your Cleopatra gloves to Leonilda? They will be a welcome gift to a country damsel. Come, will you spare them to her?"

What could she say? Of course, that she should be happy to comply with his wish. But in her heart she recoiled from this enforced courtesy. And then the cruel thought arose, that this was a scheme of her husband's, to present Leonilda with some of these gloves as a gallantry from himself, under pretence of being a friendly token from his wife. She was used as a screen, then,—a convenient blind!

Lady Capulet revolved these galling thoughts, until suddenly an idea darted like a lightning-flash into her brain. It was that of the poison. The poison that was so subtle in its effects. The poison that was to be administered through the medium of a glove. The poison that she had by her, concealed in her cabinet. At first, appalled, she started from her own suggestion; but gradually she went so far as to consider that since a week was to elapse before her husband's setting forth for Mantua, she could decide in the interim whether one of the pairs of gloves should be a poisoned pair or not. She went farther; so far as to *prepare* a pair, and to place them in her cabinet, marked with a private mark, that she might distinguish them and include them, among Leonilda's or not, as she might at the last moment determine. Fatal first step in error! Who knows whither it may lead,—through what tortuous paths it may deviate from virtue and happiness,—in what unforeseen abyss of sin and misery it may end?

On the eve of her lord's departure, lady Capulet was sitting in her own room, with her little girl, as usual, playing about, now running in and out of the balcony, among the orange trees and oleanders, now scrambling under the table, anon clambering up upon the chairs, and peeping into the vases and pateras, or peering into the large mirror that hung above it, watching the vapour fade, and fleet, and disappear, as she touched it with her rosy lips, and breathed upon its crystal surface. Capulet had just left the apartment, reminding his wife of her pro-

mised gift to Leonilda, and bidding her make up the packet; as he meant to take horse for Mantua early on the morrow.

The lady went to the cabinet. With an agitated hand she drew forth the drawer in which lay the gloves. Whether it was that the faint odour which hung about the poisoned pair, affected her; or, that a sickening sense of their insidious purpose overpowered her; but she wavered, put her hand to her forehead, and, turning away towards the open window, leaned against it, trembling, and overcome. She remained thus, for a considerable space of time, when she was suddenly aroused by hearing her little Juliet exclaim, in the pretty caressing words of an Italian child's expression of delight:—"Quanti carini! How lovely! See what a gay lady I am, with my pretty gloves, like a grown woman! See here, mammina!"

The word 'gloves' struck upon the mother's ear, with a pang of ill-omen. She looked round, and beheld the child,—who had scrambled up to the cabinet by means of a chair,—with her baby hands buried in a pair of the well-known pale-tinted, Nile-coloured gloves; holding them up in innocent triumph, smiling, and exulting, and calling upon her mother to exult with her.

In deadly terror, the mother staggered forward, snatched them off, and gave one despairing glance to see if the fatal mark were there which identified the envenomed pair. They were unmarked; and lady Capulet, catching her child to her bosom, sank on her knees, and buried her face in her hands, in a passion of thanksgiving.

After a time she arose, went to the cabinet, took from it the marked pair of gloves, which, together with the remainder of the poison, she set fire to, by means of a lighted taper, and watched them until they were reduced to ashes. When this was done, she made up the packet of gloves for Leonilda, with a firm hand; feeling as if in conquering her reluctance to send them, she made a sort of expiatory offering for her late intentional misdeed.

Time passed. Months, years, passed; and time had worked

its sobering effect upon the passions which had so agitated the soul of lady Capulet in early youth. She was now contented to accept the affectionate esteem, the indulgence of her husband, in lieu of that warmth of love, which her girlish heart and imagination had so pined for. She came to take pride in the development of that matchless beauty in her young daughter, which manifested itself more and more with each year, rather than to indulge, as formerly, in her own engrossing thoughts, and self-contemplative feelings.

Juliet's loveliness of person, while still a mere girl, was remarkable. She inherited her mother's strikingly beautiful features, with more softness of expression; her perfection of shape, and dignity of mien, with even yet more of winning grace. Her father, too, was a handsome man; his limbs were elegantly turned; he had white, well-shaped hands, and small, dapper feet; he possessed a certain aristocratic bearing, and conventional elegance of demeanour (when in society, and not bustling and fussing amid domesticities), which were very prepossessing. All the most attractive points in her father, Juliet inherited, together with those which distinguished her mother. She would have been a celebrated beauty already, had not the accustomed retirement of a young Italian maiden's life detained her hitherto from general gaze. Her father's mansion, its garden grounds, formed the limits to her sphere of existence. Here she dreamed away her life, in a succession of smiling hours; a child in thought, a child in feeling, a child in pursuit and amusement.

One morning, a friend of lady Capulet's came to pay her a visit; and began telling her with much eagerness about a matter which, she said, she had greatly at heart.

"Let's see! where ought I to begin? Oh,—you must know that there is a charming young creature, named Virginia di Coralba (sweet name, isn't it? her very name, as I say, seems to bespeak her purity), lately arrived in Verona. She is, it seems, an orphan, a rich heiress (by the way, I forgot where her estates lie—but somewhere in Calabria, I think she says), travelling about for the benefit of her health, which has suffered much, I understand, from grief at the loss of her parents. Well,

would you believe it, my dear creature, that from Venice (where last she was staying for a time), there have come certain whispers, which, if believed, would be highly prejudicial to the character of this sweet young woman. Now I have been introduced to her (by my husband, who met some distant connections of hers in the south, he says, when he made a tour there, some years ago, as a young man); and from what I see of her, and hear of her (for she talks with such charming discretion and modesty, and plays the lute like an angel), I wont believe one word of these scandalous tales. To show that I won't, and don't, I'm determined to visit her, and to take all my lady-friends to visit her. Now, your rank, your position in society, my dear dear lady Capulet, make you all-powerful. Who would dare to breathe a word against the reputation of any one, whom lady Capulet chooses to visit? All sinister whispers would die away of themselves, the very first time your coach is seen at her door. Let me beseech you, grant me the kindness to order it at once; and let me take you thither. I am dying to have you see her. How I am running on! But my heart always runs off with my head. I own I am enthusiastic for the sweet Virginia; and so will you be, when you see and hear her."

Lady Capulet, though amused at her friend, the lady Anatolia's eagerness, consented to her wish; and the two ladies set forth at once to the superb mansion, which the signora Coralba had hired for her residence during her intended sojourn at Verona.

The interview with Virginia di Coralba crowned the anticipations of her warm partisan. Lady Capulet, who had been prepared to allow somewhat for the exaggerated enthusiasm of her friend, could not resist the combination of beauty and soft manners, presented in the person of the fair stranger. A face and person almost childish in their waxen complexion, and infantine slightness; a long sweep of flaxen ringlets; eyes, in colour, like turquoise; a mouth like a rose-bud; a shrinking timidity of speech, a shy glance, a hesitating gesture, made her modesty amount nearly to bashfulness.

Her two lady-visitors went away charmed with her; and lady Anatolia was scarce more loquacious in her favour now, than the generally somewhat taciturn lady Capulet.

She seemed quite struck with the fair orphan, and took a lively interest in the difficulties of her position. She was rather surprised to find that her husband took no part in her enthusiasm on the subject. On the contrary, when she had offered to take him with her to call upon signora Coralba, he had more than once avoided accompanying her thither, and one day while she was descanting upon the loveliness of the fascinating Virginia to a lady of her acquaintance, Capulet had dropped a few words, advising her not to be so vehement in her advocacy of a stranger of whom she knew nothing.

His wife, indignant at anything that sounded like an insinuation against her charming Coralba, continued: "To let you know one of her many excellences, I will tell you, that I understand she has a brother,—an unhappy, afflicted, deformed, deaf-and-dumb brother, whom she takes about with her from place to place, wherever she goes, that he may benefit by the change of scene and air."

Capulet twitched the blossoms from a flowering myrtle that stood in the balcony, near to the open window, at which he was standing; and, as his wife went on, he rubbed them into pellets, dropping them through his fingers, and strewing the ground beneath.

"It seems that he is not only hideous in form—crooked and deformed; but so loathly in countenance—frightfully distorted, and covered with a leprous crust as it is—that he perpetually wears a large dark mantle, enshrouding him from head to foot, and a mask upon his face. Out of compassion to humanity, which would be shocked by the sight of such ultra-hideousness, the unhappy orphans hit upon this method of sparing the feelings of others, for Virginia vows she will never forsake her miserable brother. Beautiful, patient, generous Virginia!" concluded lady Capulet. "And this is the creature a malicious world would defame! A self-denying martyr!"

Capulet jerked the remainder of the pellets high up into the air, scattering them far and wide, as he abruptly quitted the window and whisked out of the room.

The more lady Capulet saw of Virginia di Coralba, the more infatuated she became with her.

In the frequent communion that now took place between them, the former of course, often saw this brother; that is, as much of him as could be seen. He usually sat, huddled in his dark cloak, masked, mute, and apart, unable to take the least share in the conversation. Virginia would speak of him, in his presence, without the least reserve, as his deafness prevented his feelings being hurt by any allusions to his afflicted state.

"Are you quite sure, dear Virginia;" said lady Capulet, "that no sense of hearing lingers? I fancied I saw an involuntary movement—a slight start—when you alluded to his calamity."

"Not a syllable—not a breath, alas!" sighed Virginia, "e'er makes its way to those sealed portals. I am compelled to write down all I would say to him."

She drew a small set of tablets, that lay upon the table, towards her as she spoke, and hastily wrote upon them, "Give me your hand, dear brother!"

She held the words before the masked face.

A hand was protruded from the folds of the mantle; and Virginia clasped it fondly, held it for awhile in both hers, looking upon it with streaming eyes, and murmuring, "Dear, dear brother! Endeared, by thy afflictions, beyond all brothers! Dearer than ever brother was to sister!"

As lady Capulet threw a glance of curiosity towards this hand, to see whether it bore any evidence of deformity, she was struck by a singular mark it bore. In the centre of the back of the hand, was a deep empurpled scar, cut in the shape of a cross. It was precisely, in shape, hue, and position, similar to one which she had often remarked on the hand of signor Vitruvio, her friend, lady Anatolia's husband. As her eyes fixed upon this remarkable scar, she perceived the hand struggle, as if to disengage itself from Virginia's hold.

"Strange!" she could not help inwardly exclaiming. The impression haunted her. As she drove homeward, she bid her coachman take her as speedily as possible, to the house of her friend Anatolia.

"Is the lady Anatolia at home?"

"Yes, madam."

"Signor Vitruvio?"

"No, madam. My master has been abroad the whole morning."

"'Tis no matter. I will see them this evening. Bid my coachman drive home. Surely never were two marks so singular yet so precisely alike! On the left hand, too! And then the consciousness apparent in the movement! Strange!"

That evening, when she met her friends, she took care to look particularly at Vitruvio's left hand. The scrutiny confirmed the wonderful identity of the mark on the hand of her friend's husband, and on that which had been put forth from the dark cloak which enshrouded Virginia's deaf-and-dumb brother.

Again and again she repeated to herself:—"Strange! Can it be possible! Can I have been deceived in her? And poor Anatolia!—So enthusiastic—so generously unmistrustful! Can you be playing her false, sly signor Vitruvio? I shall see Virginia again to-morrow; and it shall go hard, but I'll get another sight of her brother's left hand."

But before lady Capulet paid her visit to the fair Coralba the next morning, it so happened that the lady Anatolia called, at an hour still earlier.

The brother sat as usual, muffled, and apparently unnoting.

"Is not your poor brother dull, sometimes, my dear creature?" asked Anatolia of Virginia. "How sadly he must lack amusement, cut off as he is from the usual resources of mankind, among their fellow-men."

"He generally contrives to find entertainment from watching the passers-by from that window, where he usually sits, you see;" answered she. "Besides, he and I, when we are alone, have this means of interchanging our thoughts;" and she took up the tablets. She wrote down:—"We love each other, do we not, my brother, though we have no other means than this, of uttering our feelings?"

She held the lines before the masked visage; and then a hand came from beneath the mantle and wrote beneath:—"No brother could love—no brother hath the reason to love—his sister, as I love my Virginia."

The eyes of the lady Anatolia happened to fall upon the hand

which inscribed this sentence; and she could hardly believe what they beheld, when she saw upon the middle finger, a very peculiar ring, which was exactly like one that her friend's husband, Capulet, constantly wore. She looked at it carefully; and felt more and more assured of the precise similarity.

"Very extraordinary!" thought she, after she had taken leave, and was driving away from the house. "Can we after all have been deceived in this Virginia! Pshaw! impossible! My silly head is off at a tangent as usual, at the mere sight of a ring—a bauble!"

As her carriage left the Coralba's door-way, lady Capulet's equipage drove up. "I have brought you some flowers, Virginia;" she said, as she entered the saloon, where the brother and sister sat together. "I fancied your brother would take pleasure in their beauty and perfume."

"Like your kind heart to devise means of delight for one whose unhappy state leaves him so few;" replied Virginia. Then she wrote on the tablets:—"The amiable lady Capulet has brought hither flowers from her garden, for thy express behoof, my brother."

She held up the tablets, and tendered the flowers. A hand was stretched forth to receive them. It was the left hand; and lady Capulet's eyes fastened upon it. But no scar was there. It was white and unblemished.

Virginia wrote another sentence:—"Will you not write your thanks, dear brother, to the gentle lady?"

But the tablets were hastily rejected by the left hand.

Virginia made some farther effort to induce her brother's compliance; but he seemed as if he either could not or would not understand her wish.

No sooner had lady Capulet quitted the room, than Virginia di Coralba exclaimed harshly, "Why in Lucifer's name, did you not write when I bade you?"

"Softly, fair Coralba!" said the gentleman in the mask. This confounded ring would have betrayed me. She would infallibly have recognized it, and then we had both been lost, for she is——"

"Pshaw!" interrupted Virginia. "Why could you not pull off the ring, under your cloak?"

"It is tight for me; I snatched, and plucked, and pulled at it, but in vain. It wouldn't come off, all I could do. Besides, if it had, she would have known my handwriting, for——"

"So, then, she would have seen characters that have often met her eye in the form of an amorous billet?" laughed Virginia, scornfully. "She is one of your worship's old flames, is she?"

"She is my wife!" replied the gentleman. "And I am a sorry villain to have wronged a generous unsuspicious nature, that shows kindness to a supposed orphan brother and sister—for the sake of one who is an embodied falsehood; with the tongue of a virago in a mouth of meal; her very name's a mockery. Virginia! Coralba! Herself as hollow an unreality as her sham brother! 'Deformed,' quotha!" exclaimed he, flinging off the mantle; "'Foul-visaged!'" chucking the mask on the table; "'Deaf-and-dumb!'"

"And so she is thy wife?" said Virginia, in a tone of mingled derision and triumph. "I knew I could not be mistaken; I discerned thee for one of the married herd, or thou hadst ne'er been admitted of my train. A pretty fellow to rail at me as a falsehood, a deceit! Pray what art thou? Didst not palm thyself off a gay young bachelor? And these are the fellows,—these husbands, these hypocrite knaves,—who denounce a wife, for a word, a look given to another than to him. Get thee gone; let me see no more of thee. Begone, I say!" she repeated, with so unmistakable a decision of tone and gesture, that Capulet thought fit to tarry no longer; but straightway walked out.

His wife had meanwhile driven to her friend the lady Anatolia, and arranged with her, that they would go together on the morrow to the house of the Coralba, and keep a close watch upon her and her muffled brother, during their visit; since they mutually confessed they began to have their suspicions of the fair-seeming Virginia, and her mysterious relation.

It was singular, that lady Capulet, who had formerly suffered such tortures of jealousy on groundless occasions, should now entertain no shadow of mistrust. The conviction of the injustice she had done Capulet in the case of Leonilda, together

with the salutary teaching engendered of remorse, had greatly contributed to her present freedom from misgiving. Certain it is, that lady Capulet's suspicions never for one instant glanced towards her husband, when her eyes were opened to the true character of the pseudo Virginia di Coralba. The two ladies found this artless young creature hanging over her brother, turning the leaves of a portfolio of drawings, for his entertainment.

Lady Capulet said :—"I have brought some more flowers for your brother, my dear, since he seemed pleased with those the other day;" and without waiting for the ceremony of the tablets, she held them at once towards the muffled figure.

A hand—a left hand—was promptly stretched forth to receive them.

"No scar!" thought lady Capulet. Aloud she said, "Your brother is miraculously cured of his deafness! I give you joy, Virginia."

Virginia shook her head. "I fear his hearing is no better, madam. He must have seen the nosegay in your hand; he has a keen sight for flowers; he loves them so." She sighed with a pretty deploring air.

"You are fond of flowers then, sir?" wrote lady Anatolia on the tablets; which she placed open before the masked man. A hand came forth, and wrote down reply, "Far beyond my poor powers of expression!"

"No ring!" thought lady Anatolia. Then she added aloud, "Virginia, my dear, I have planned a charming scheme for the enjoyment of your brother. It is, to go to a country-seat on the Adige, belonging to signor Vitruvio and myself, where there are flowers in profusion, for the delight of your poor brother, and where the rest of us will, I hope, find a few days' agreeable repose from the gaieties and bustle of Verona. What say you, my dear?"

"You are only too good, sweet madam," replied Virginia di Coralba. "But alas! I fear that my dear brother will be unable to——"

"Tut, tut!" interrupted lady Anatolia, rising to take leave; "I will take no denial, my dear. So be prepared to give us

your company to-morrow, when my friend lady Capulet and I will call for you in my coach. Addio! A rivedersi!"

No sooner had the two ladies left the room, than the gentleman in the cloak sprang from his seat, threw back the hood, plucked off the mask, and burst into a fit of merriment.

The laughing features were neither those of the grave signor Vitruvio, nor of the middle-aged Capulet. They were those of a young gallant, scarce arrived at manhood; so light was the down on his lip, so sparkling and boylike the mirth in his roguish eyes, so thoughtless and careless his whole bearing. He seemed as though frolic—the love of jest—the light spirits of youth, were his sole guide, his only rule of action.

"And how wilt thou contrive now, fair plotter?" he said. "Thou canst not carry on the disguise for days together, beneath their very eyes—at least, I cannot; it hath well-nigh stifled me already. Ouf!" exclaimed he, as he cast away the cloak. "Fairly caught in thine own springe, my dainty woodhen!" he continued. "Own thyself foiled, at length, by these quiet ladies. 'Faith, they more than suspect thee already, I believe; for didst thou see how they scanned thy deaf-and-dumb brother?"

"I will yet foil them, not they me!" exclaimed Virginia. "When those women come to-morrow, they shall find the bird, they thought to snare, flown. Share my flight,—you have no tie here,—go with me to some far-away place where we may live to each other. I will no longer be known as Virginia di Coralba; you shall adopt some other name than Mercutio."

"Nay, returned the youth, I have, as thou say'st, few ties. But one or two I have which I would fain not break. I have a generous friend and kinsman in the prince; two favourite companions in a couple of lads ycleped Romeo and Benvolio; who, though sober-sided youths, yet have a something about them that would make me loath to leave them. But for thyself, fair Coralba; gramercy for thy kind intention, but knowing as I do, that I can boast no iota of steadiness in all my madcap composition, I were a pre-perjured villain to vow constancy."

He bowed and withdrew.

The lady Anatolia had no sooner stepped, with lady Capulet,

into her coach, than she said, "I have a scheme to unmask this creature. I shall ask both our husbands to accompany us to the country, without telling them whom they are to meet; and then we can have their unbiassed opinions to confirm our own. How say you?"

"I think your plan is good, if you can bring it to bear;" answered lady Capulet; mentally adding, "Poor Anatolia! How unsuspecting she is! I wonder whether signor Vitruvio will indeed be there."

And as this passed through her mind, her friend was thinking, "Poor Angelica! How guileless she is! What if her wretch should send an excuse, and not come?"

But the experiment was never tried; for on the following day, Virginia di Coralba had disappeared from Verona.

And now it was, that lady Capulet had leisure of mind to devote her companionship to her young daughter. Hitherto, she had been so absorbed in her own reflections, that she had given but sparing attention to Juliet, who had been thrown almost wholly on her own resources for the development of her ideas. She had been brought up in the style of seclusion and retirement usual for a young Italian lady. Her intercourse had been strictly limited to the members of her own family, and their household. From earliest childhood she had been in the habit of seeing her father at his breakfast-hour, before he went out to his rounds of visiting; and had invariably been brought to bid him good-night, when he happened to be in the house at her own early bed-time. He had good-naturedly frolicked with her, when some party did not call him away, and took pride and joy in marking her growth, her beauty and grace of person. Her mother had had her in the room with her while she embroidered, or sat at home; but for the most part, the little creature had played about at her feet, while lady Capulet silently pursued her occupation, lost in thought; and as the child grew into the young girl, the hours she spent in her mother's room, had passed scarcely less silently; for the lively questions that naturally sprang to her lips, learned to restrain themselves from utterance, when, through a course of years, they met with but monosyllables, or short sentences spoken abstractedly, in reply.

Gradually, her communion with both father and mother became almost entirely restricted to the wonted periodical salutes, exchanged between Italian parent and child, when she kissed, first their cheeks, and then their hands, on bidding them good-morning,—after meal-time,—and before retiring to rest.

Juliet's most constant associate was the nurse; who still maintained her situation about her person. Once, when there had been a talk of engaging a waiting-maid, the nurse was highly affronted; exclaiming:—"Ought not I to know how to dress thee, better than any tire-woman of them all? I, who bore thee——in my arms? I, who shared my own Susan's milk with thee, when my good man—rest his merry soul!—stood by? Well, there's no standing 'gainst a tottering wall, when an earthquake bids it jog,—and us be jogging! But e'en in falling stones, is Heaven's mercy! It took both the merry heart, and the little one too good for this earth, to its own rest,—rest their souls!"

The person whom Juliet held in chiefest reverence as her friend and counsellor, was her spiritual director, her confessor, a certain holy man, called friar Lawrence, a brother of the Franciscan order. In his quiet cell, kneeling at his feet, pouring out her innocent soul in humility and contrition for offences, fancied rather than actual, this young girl gained teaching from his wisdom, help and strength from his virtue, steadfastness and courage from his moral admonition. Some of her happiest hours were those she spent in the good friar's cell.

Juliet was by no means an intellectual girl either from nature, or from training. She inherited a susceptible disposition from her father,—a man of gallantry and pleasure. From her mother,—a woman of strong though suppressed feeling, she inherited a sensitive, passionate temperament. Her parents' several native qualifications and habits, unfitted them for the development of their young daughter's mind; and it has rarely been the usage in Italy to bestow much cultivation on a young maiden's mental acquirements, from external sources,—from masters.

Juliet's refinement sprang from herself. She had a natural affinity with the beautiful in all things. She had an innate per-

ception of the beautiful and the voluptuous in both Nature and Art. It was through this intense appreciation of beauty, that her refinement existed. Her heart informed her mind. It might be said, that her feelings, rather than her understanding, thought. Profoundly impressionable,—her senses and instincts were more at work than any mental process. Her soul was elevated by its native purity, and affinity with beauty, rather than by any inspiration or effort of intellect. Her religion was one of sentiment rather than of conviction,—of impulse, not reason. She knelt at the good friar's feet with all the implicit reverence, the unquestioning faith, the passive credence, of a child; she let him judge for her, rather than used judgment of her own; and took for granted, unscrutinized, all that he said, or made her subscribe to.

It was this passionate sense of beauty in all existing things,—whether of Heaven's creation, or of man's ingenuity, that supplied Juliet with food for her ideality of feeling; and entirely precluded any sense of dulness or weariness in the retired and monotonous life which had been hers. She felt no want of society, while she had the glorious face of Nature to look upon in loving companionship; she scarcely missed human associates, while she revelled in contemplation of sky, and earth; shadow, and sunshine; morning light, and starry evenings; the broad expanse of her father's garden-grounds, the partial glimpse of the impetuous Adige, the distant purple of the mountains, sole boundary to a scene affording wide scope to the imagination. Her father's indulgence had given her a range of apartments, in one wing of the palace, that commanded a magnificent view from one of the large balconies that opened from her own peculiar chamber. This balcony was a favourite resort of Juliet's. It was here that she filled her soul with happy contemplation. It was here that,—no reader,—she fed her thoughts with things, rather than with studies, and gained ideas from objects, instead of from books. She learned wondrous secrets from tree, and shrub, and flower; she heaped up strange lore from noontide rays, and the soft moonbeams; she stored up innumerable fancies from the ever-dancing waters of the fountain, from the growth of blossoms, from the ripening of fruit, from watching

the flights, the careerings, the hoverings, of birds and their nestlings; from listening to the lark's upsoaring rush of song, and to the luxuriant melody of the nightingale.

Thus, her native tendency to whatsoever contained elements of harmony and beauty, engendered its own power of culture, and refinement.

It came, as a matter of necessity, from such a process of self-forming, that Juliet rarely gave expression to her thoughts. They were rather vague musings, delicious reveries, insubstantial day-dreams, indulged secretly and alone, in the retirement of her own chamber, than uttered to others, brought forward, or discussed. They were a hoarded treasure of silent communings with her own spirit; not spoken, or idly shown.

Indeed, as has been seen, she had few to whom she could have confided them. One other person there was, besides those already cited, with whom she held intercourse; and that one was Rosaline, a niece of Capulet's. But she, though a young and very beautiful girl, was still so much older than Juliet, that there was less of freedom and intimacy between them than might have been supposed to exist with two such near relations. Besides, they had scarcely a point of sympathy in common; their dispositions, tastes, opinions, feelings, were all singularly dissimilar. Juliet was warm and enthusiastic; Rosaline was cold and sedate. Juliet was impassioned in her language, when she ventured to give utterance to the emotions that stirred within her; Rosaline was grave and measured in speech, and rarely gave words to anything but arguments, and ascertained facts.

Rosaline was so serenely didactic, so solemnly oracular, and evinced such placid faith in her own unerring judgment, that she passed among her own friends for a prodigy; a singularly superior young lady. Capulet stood secretly in much awe of her; in her presence his usual glib volubility, and garrulous ease subsided into a sort of snubbed silence. He would whisper behind his hand to some one near, as a sort of deprecatory votive offering to her superiority :—"My dear sir, she is quite a philosopher, I can assure you ;—quite one of the illuminati in petticoats ;—a very very superior young woman is my fair niece Rosaline, let me tell you, sir!" Rosaline had announced, in

her own sublime style of lofty humility, that it was her intention to forswear love, to abjure wedlock, to vow herself to celibacy; in order that she might the better dedicate her whole soul to meditation on all matters abstruse and recondite.

Tybalt, one day, in his off-hand style, astounded his uncle by rapping out the remark that "it would be no great loss to the bachelor world if she did die unmarried; for that no one would have such an affected young pedant!"

Capulet looked scared; but, casting a furtive glance in the direction of his fair niece, and seeing that she was engaged in silencing somebody with an oration upon her own views touching a mooted theory, he indulged in a little stealthy titter; which, however, was nipped in the bud by her turning her head in his direction; whereupon he rose, fidgeted about, took up a humorous print that lay on a table near, as if that had been the cause of his laugh; and at last, ambled out of the room.

Shortly after, some visitors who had been there, took leave; and the two young ladies were left alone.

Juliet ventured timidly to ask her cousin Rosaline, what had made her take so violent a resolution against love and marriage.

"Not 'violent;'—but decided;" replied she. "I should not choose the duties of wife and mother,—duties, which I should consider myself called upon to fulfil, and should fulfil most scrupulously and conscientiously, were I to accept the title,—I should not choose, I say, these duties to interfere with those higher tasks to which I have devoted my energies."

"Can there be higher?" said the soft voice of Juliet. It was so soft, that perhaps her cousin did not hear the remark; at any rate, Rosaline went on as if there had been no interruption.

"But not only should I object to the onerous and incessant calls upon time and thought which the conjugal and maternal offices involve;" she said; "but I seriously repugn the notion of wasting, in the idle process of courting, precious moments that might be so far more advantageously bestowed; there is a young lord who persecutes me with his attentions, and will not be said nay; and his vexatious suit teaches me the trouble, and, noyance, and frivolous waste of time that courtship is. The

youth I speak of,—I will not tell you his name, Juliet, for his sake, poor fellow!—is well enough,—nay, very well; he is really handsome, and heir to one of the noblest houses in Verona; but so importunately, so abominably in love, that really I should have no time I could call my own, were I to admit his attentions. If he be so exacting, now that he is hopeless, what would he be, you know, my dear, were he a favoured lover?"

She held forth for some time longer in this strain; but seeing Juliet wrapt in her own thoughts, soon after took leave. Juliet was indeed pondering upon many things that suggested themselves to her thought, during this late—not conversation, but harangue. It struck her, among other things, that Rosaline seemed to take pride in the fact of this youth's love, not for any delight it afforded her, but for the glory of having it to reject. As she had looked into her cousin's beautiful face, and heard her descant so coolly upon this passionate lover, she marvelled; she could not but wonder to hear one so lovely proclaim herself so unloving. She wondered that Rosaline could resist the charm of an attachment so devoted. She felt a strange kind of pity and sympathy for this unknown lover, so hopelessly enamoured. She now, for the first time, asked herself what her own feelings would be, were she to discover that she had inspired such a passion. The idea startled her; and held her for some time pausing, with her cheek leaning upon her hand, her head drooping, and her eyes fixed upon the ground. She was still quite a girl in years, though on the verge of Southern early womanhood; her heart spoke powerfully in its young and ardent feelings; it was pure, fresh, unhackneyed; all the more potent in its impulses, for its very purity. She sat there, deeply musing, motionless as though she had been a statue. She seemed awaiting,—like the clay Pandora, the touch of Prometheus,—the vital fire of Love, which was to make her, from a dreaming child into a sentient, passionate woman.

She was aroused from her abstracted mood, by the return of Tybalt. He began with his usual vehemence, to tell her of some offence he had newly taken, upon some imaginary ground, against some members of the rival family of the Montagues.

She had more than once heard of public contentions, of affrays in the open street, that had taken place between parties of the several houses; but she had not entered into the merits of these contests, save inasmuch, as she concluded that the Montagues were of course in the wrong, and the Capulets of course in the right. She now only made out that Tybalt was enraged against young Romeo, the son of lord Montague, for assuming the right of walking in a certain grove of sycamore that lay to the west of the city, with an air as if he claimed the sole occupancy of the place; and that her cousin was highly indignant, for some unstated cause, against young Benvolio, whom he called "a conceited pragmatist."

He went on to mutter:—"The fellow holds himself to be best fencer in Verona; when, as all the world knows, and as I hope to prove, one day,—but enough." He started up, bit his lip; then burst out again, with some invective against Mercutio.

His cousin asked some slight question concerning the lord Montague's son.

"Hang him!" was the reply. "Sweet youth, and virtuous gentleman as he is reputed by the wiseacres of our city, I hope to see him hanged some day, or throttled somehow. I shall never feel at rest till the whole tribe of Montagues are got rid of,—cast out from amongst us,—fairly banished from Verona."

Juliet smiled at his testy humour; and to divert him from it, told him that her father had spoken of a masked ball which he intended giving on the occasion of his wedding-day anniversary; having always marked it by a festival of some kind.

Tybalt said something in reply, about letting his friend Paris know, that he might have his mask and domino in readiness; and added, with a meaning look, which Juliet could not then interpret, that he believed his friend, the county, intended having a private interview with his uncle Capulet before the ball.

The result of this interview was communicated to her afterwards. The evening appointed for the entertainment had arrived; and just as Juliet was about to enter the ball-room, she thought she heard her mother's voice, in another apartment,

enquiring for her. Then the nurse, who was with lady Capulet, came forth to summon her to her mother's presence. Juliet hastened towards her, with the words :—

"*How now, who calls?*"

ROMEO AND JULIET, Act. i. Sc. 3.



TALE XI.

BEATRICE AND HERO; THE COUSINS.

A SOUND cuff.

"What do you hit me for?"

Another. "Give it up! Will you give it up?"

"No!"

Another cuff, And a box on the ear. "Give it up, I say!"

Another "No" was about to be bawled; and a look in the lout's eye gave token that it would probably be accompanied by a return of the blows he had received; but suddenly he seemed to think better of it, flung down the demanded toy, turned on his heel, and made off.

The little girl who was thus left victress of the field, picked up the doll, brushed the dust off its smart skirts, ascertained that its nose was neither cracked nor flattened, nor its eyes damaged, and then triumphantly walked up to another little girl, who had stood aloof during the affray, and restored the plundered favourite to her arms.

"Oh, I'm so glad to have her back! My beautiful new doll that my father gave me only yesterday!" exclaimed the child, hugging it to her, and smiling through the tears that still glittered on her cheeks.

"Why did you let him snatch it from you?" said the other little girl. "Why didn't you force him to give it up?"

"He was such a great fierce lad—I couldn't—I didn't dare;" replied she.

"Why didn't your sister run after him, then, for you, and

thump him, till he gave it up?" persisted the first little girl, looking towards a young boy who stood by, rubbing his knees, and his elbows alternately; looking very disconsolate; with a few big tears rolling down his face.

"I'm not a girl, miss!" he blurted out, with a half shame-faced, half indignant glance at the beautiful, spirited face that was eyeing him. "What made you take me for a girl? Don't you see my dress?" And he cast a look of sheepish pride at his legs, which certainly were cased in masculine fashion.

"Don't I see your tears? What's crying but the trick of a girl?" said she. "Why didn't you fly after the fellow, instead of standing blubbering there?"

"He knocked me down!" said the boy. "He took good care to make sure of me, before he snatched at Hero's doll. How could I fly, miss, when he knocked me down?"

"But I suppose you could have scrambled up again, couldn't you? But for the sake of your sister's doll, you might have——"

"She isn't my sister,—she's my cousin!" interrupted the boy, glad to seize upon any point of defence, that he could safely maintain.

"Never mind, Gaetano, I have my doll again;" said its owner; and then, she turned to the little girl who had so bravely rescued it for her, and thanked her, in a manner so pretty as to bespeak her unmistakeably the young lady born and bred.

The children fell into talk; and began to question each other how it was they happened to be out alone, who they were, and so forth.

It appeared that the little girl, Hero, was the governor of Messina's daughter, his sole child and heiress; that the young boy, Gaetano, was the son of her uncle, Antonio. That they had left the palace in the morning, for a walk, attended by a servant; but that some public procession had suddenly attracted a crowd, in which they had been separated from their attendant. The other little girl, when she learned their names, uttered an exclamation of surprise. She told them that she was their cousin; that her name was Beatrice. That she was bound to

their house, at the very time she encountered them; and that, singularly enough, the circumstance which had occasioned Hero and Gaetano to lose sight of their attendant, had also separated her from the person who was entrusted with the charge of bringing her from her native place to Messina.

Beatrice was an orphan. Her mother had married a poor lieutenant, contrary to the will of a rich maiden aunt; and, in consequence, had been cast off, disavowed, denounced. But, on her death-bed, she bequeathed her little girl to the guardianship of Leonato, beseeching him to be a father to her orphan child.

It was on her way to her future home, that Beatrice happened to witness the incident which brought her so unexpectedly acquainted with her young relations.

Some few years had gone by without incident, after Beatrice's domestication at her uncle Leonato's house; when unexpectedly, he received a message from the countess Giustina, his aunt, to say, that now his young daughter was beyond babyhood, she wished to make acquaintance with her, as the individual in whose person would eventually centre the honours of their house. This countess Giustina, was the aunt whom the mother of Beatrice had mortally offended by her marriage. Her heart had been warmly fixed upon this girl, but she cast her from her, resolving never more to behold her. She remained shut up in her castle, held little intercourse with the world; none, save an occasional interchange of messengers, between her two nephews and herself. She never lost the habit of authority with them; and now, when she wrote to her nephew Leonato, bidding him give her the pleasure of seeing his daughter, she dictated the conditions of the visit. She forbade the attendance of any hand-maidens; saying, that her own woman should wait upon the young ladies. She begged that Hero might be accompanied by her female cousin only. This was the sole allusion made to Beatrice throughout the letter.

The old lady's castle lay up among the mountains, and their way lay through scenery of the most picturesque beauty.

Their journey was performed in a litter, drawn by mules, well-suited to the rugged mountain-paths they had to traverse.

The novelty, the beauty, the delightful sense of open air and motion, had their effect upon the timid Hero. She forgot her apprehensions, in the present pleasure. She enjoyed the journey to the full as much as her cousin; and it was not until the sun was sinking towards the west, that she began to exhibit symptoms of an abated satisfaction.

Beatrice remarked her uneasiness, and tried to cheer her with her sprightly talk.

"Are you looking out for Montaspro, Hero? We shall soon be there, I dare say; and then for a hearty supper, and a good long rest. How we shall enjoy to-morrow morning, Hero!"

"Shall we?" said Hero, abstractedly. "Don't you see something brindled, crouching over there? If it should be a wolf! They say, that there are wolves among these mountains; and snakes, Beatrice."

"Well, they won't hurt us; they can't glide up into the coach, and bite our heads off, unaware, can they, Hero?" laughed her cousin.

"Hush! What's that?—Hark! don't you hear a noise? If it should be banditti!"

"It sounds to me, like the rush of waters;" said Beatrice. Then, she pointed through the curtains on her side. "Look! is not that a grand sight?" she said.

Through an opening in the rocks, appeared the castle of Montaspro.

"And that is Montaspro?" whispered Hero. "It looks a fit residence for our stern grand-aunt, the severe-eyed lady Giustina. How shall we ever venture to encounter her?"

"Come, call thy courage to thee. Remember, she's no ogress; she will neither eat thee, nor murder thee. Let her looks be never so terrible, she will not harm thee, believe it."

It was nightfall ere they reached Montaspro.

As the litter proceeded across the drawbridge, and beneath the massive gateway, and they entered a spacious courtyard, where a body of the lady Giustina's retainers received them by torch-light, the scene was so strange, that it might well have struck more self-possessed travellers than the two young cousins, with awe.

Two stately personages, the Countess's Seneschal, and the Countess's Duenna, led the cousins into a spacious apartment, where sat the lady of Montaspro. She occupied an easy chair by the hearth; but she sat perfectly erect. She was surrounded by all the tokens of wealth and a magnificent taste; but her own person was simply attired, to an almost ostentatious plainness.

"And you are Hero?" she said, taking a hand of her young grandniece in hers.

"Yes, madam;" replied Hero; "and here is Beatrice;" she added, looking towards her cousin, who had followed her up to the countess's chair.

But the lady Giustina kept her eyes fixed upon Hero's face, saying;—"I see your father in your look, maiden. How is he? How doth my good nephew Leonato?"

"My father is well, madam, and bade me present his dutiful greetings to your ladyship. My cousin is charged with them, no less than myself." And again she turned to where Beatrice stood waiting to pay her respects.

And again, lady Giustina took no notice of the reference.

There was a pause. And then the countess put her two hands upon the arms of her chair, and turning her face in the direction of Beatrice, said in a suppressed voice:—"Come hither, child."

Beatrice advanced a step, and stood immediately before her. The old lady's eyes were raised as if by an effort of will, and directed full upon the face of the young girl.

The keen black eyes never wavered; their lids never stirred; the muscles of the mouth never altered; but the red lips waned in colour, until they blanched to the whiteness of the pale face itself.

Beatrice had it in her heart to say that she had no greetings to bring from a living parent, but that her mother's parting hour had been embittered by the thought of dying unforgiven of one, who had been deeply beloved, though so unrelenting; but there was something arose within her, to check the reproachful speech.

The lady Giustina raised her hand, as if to screen her eyes

from the glare of light. Then she said:—"Welcome to Montaspro, child; I am well pleased that you should have accompanied Hero; well-pleased to have both my young cousins to spend some time with me; and trust they are well-pleased to come."

"And now, Prisca," said the lady Giustina, addressing her stately gentlewoman, "these young ladies will doubtless be glad to see their rooms."

The ancient handmaiden led the way up a flight of stairs, wide enough to have admitted the two girls being carried up them in the litter in which they had travelled,—mules and all. They passed on into a corridor so lofty, and so long, that it looked like the aisle of a cathedral; it opened by side doors, into different chambers. One of these doors, the stately gentlewoman threw open; while she looked at Hero, and said:—"Yours, young lady!"

As Hero peeped into its depths, she thought it looked like a chill cavern; but the stately gentlewoman did not tarry for her to examine it, but led the way straight on to another long and lofty corridor; at one of the doors in which, the ancient duenna stopped, and throwing it open, she looked at Beatrice, and said:—"Yours, young lady!"

The two girls exchanged a dismayed glance.

Hero stood aghast, and said nothing. But Beatrice said:—"We are in the habit of having but one room between us, mistress Prisca; either of these we have seen, will serve for us both."

"My lady ordered separate chambers;" said the ancient gentlewoman, with the sententiousness of an oracle.

"Can we not have rooms nearer together, then, mistress Prisca?" persisted Beatrice.

"These are the appointed chambers;" rejoined the gentlewoman, as if uttering an irrevocable fiat.

"Why not dis-appoint them? Better they be disappointed, surely, than we, of sleeping near each other, when we desire it;" replied Beatrice.

"If you wish alteration, you must ask my lady;" said the duenna.

"No, no; pray, Beatrice, no, no;" eagerly whispered Hero; then she added aloud:—"Let it be as it is; since it is my aunt's wish, we are satisfied."

The cousins hastily performed such toilette evolutions, as would enable them to meet their grand-aunt in requisite order for supper; while the grim mistress Prisca officiated as tire-woman. She was a gaunt, bony person, looking mightily like a veteran man-at-arms dressed in a coif and pinners, and petticoats. She had angular features, pointed elbows, a flat chest; and her skirts hung so lank, as to look as if they wrapped a couple of vine-props. She was habitually silent; never spoke, but in reply; and when she did open her lips, she used the fewest possible words, and spoke in the dryest possible voice. She glided about the gloomy apartment, hovering round the two girls, supplying them with what they needed; looking like a ghostly skeleton, doomed to walk the earth in the garb of a waiting woman, abiding until she should be accosted, according to the invariable usage of ghosts, ere she could speak to these inhabitants of earth.

During the meal, lady Giustina was very gracious to her young cousins; and afterwards dismissed them to their night's rest with words of hospitable courtesy.

At the door of Hero's cavernous room the cousins parted for the night. Mistress Prisca being present, they only exchanged a good-night kiss, and a slight squeeze of the hand; but Beatrice, as she took her way on to her own chill cavern, thought of Hero's white cheeks, and could not get to sleep for some time, from sympathy with the discomfort she knew her cousin was suffering.

Next morning, the first glimpse she had of them, showed how accurately she had guessed; they were still more wan, and poor Hero had evidently had little or no rest.

The lady Giustina was seated at the breakfast-table, when Beatrice and Hero approached to pay her their morning respects.

"Your journey somewhat excuses your late-rising, maidens;" said the countess; "but in future, let me find you here, in the breakfast-room when I come down. Better youth should wait for age, than age for youth."

"And yet age would be glad sometimes to wait for youth, if it could hope to be overtaken by it again, would it not, aunt?" said Beatrice. "It would be pleasant to keep people older than ourselves, waiting, if we could hope to make them as young as ourselves; for then we might hope to keep them the longer with us, you know."

"So, so, saucy child, thou hast a rogue's tongue of thine own, hast thou?" said the countess, with a smiling tone, that showed her anything but displeased by the sally. "But provided it do not exceed a discreet gaiety, I shall be glad to let it dance to the bidding of its heart's tune of content."

"And that is to the tune of I know not how much—a measureless measure!" said Beatrice, in great glee to find the formidable aunt encourage her in rattling on gaily. "I am in higher than tip-topmost spirits, this morning, at the thought of the delightful mountain ramble you are going to allow us to take, madam."

"Am I, child? No, not a mountain ramble; these wild passes might not be so safe for you. Montaspro hath not a neighbour roof within many miles of it; and the rocks and caverns harbour gentry, they say, who are not pleasant to meet with. What makes you tremble, Hero?" said lady Giustina, interrupting herself, and fixing her jet eyes upon the young girl's face. "Your father's child should be no coward."

"My cousin belies neither her father's name, nor her own, madam;" said Beatrice. "Hero is no coward."

"She seems no great heroine;" said lady Giustina. "How wouldst thou be able to meet a real danger, maiden, if thou quak'st now at the mere mention of one? Keep thy heart brave, and thy spirit strong, and then they will serve thee in time of need."

"Hero hath a tender heart, and a gentle spirit, madam, but they neither of them want for courage when occasion calls for it;" said Beatrice. "She hath stood between me and disgrace many a time, when my giddy spirits had well-nigh got me into scrapes. But shall we not, indeed, be allowed to enjoy a ramble among this fine scenery?"

"Beyond the demesnes, you must not go;" said the countess.

"But the castle-grounds are extensive, and command several fine points of view. You shall walk abroad, attended by my gentlewoman, after breakfast."

Beatrice felt disposed to have uttered a remark as to the abatement their delight in the ramble would suffer, if accompanied by Mistress Prisca; but she prudently suppressed it.

The grounds belonging to castle Montaspro were indeed, as their mistress had described them, both fine and extensive. They were magnificent in their wild luxuriance; grand in their uncultivated beauty. Notwithstanding the presence of the angular duenna, Beatrice enjoyed her walk intensely; but she could perceive that her cousin was constrained, abstracted, joyless. She longed for an opportunity of speaking unreservedly with Hero, that she might endeavour to reason her out of her uneasiness, and to cheer her into better spirits. She felt there was no chance of it, so long as that lank shadow, that ghostly silence, stalked beside them; so she resolved to get rid of the restraint. Beatrice knew it was of no use to appeal to mistress Prisca herself, who would be sure to reply:—"My lady bade me accompany you;" or, "The countess desired I should attend you;" so she hit upon a device to distance her without her concurrence.

"Come, Hero! Let you and me have a good race together as far as yonder pine-clump!" exclaimed she, with a glance at her cousin; and in another moment the two girls had set off at a rate of speed that quickly left mistress Prisca far in the rear. By dint of appointing fresh goals, as often as the duenna gained upon them, Beatrice and Hero contrived to get some snatches of talk together.

"Dear Hero, you are unhappy, I fear; tell me what grieves you."

"Not unhappy, Beatrice; but I wish we were at home. This wild place—this gloomy old castle—my terrible aunt,——"

"Nay, she is not so terrible, surely, as we had pictured to ourselves. Though she can look seriously enough when she chooses, yet she can also look pleasantly. Did you see?—She all but smiled this morning. If you do not like to ask her leave that we have one room, I will."

"No, no, Beatrice; if you love me, don't do that. She will think me a coward! She will reproach me with my dastardly spirit. Promise me that you won't speak of it to my aunt. Anything better than that."

Beatrice had but just time to calm Hero's agitation by the required promise, before the angular mistress Prisca overtook them.

She made no remark, but her looks censured them severely. Of these, however, the cousins took no notice; and they returned, in silence, to the castle.

Day followed day, and week succeeded to week; and yet Hero's awe of the countess Giustina lessened no jot. Her night terrors were as powerful as ever; but they yielded before the greater one of letting her aunt know of them.

Beatrice perceived that Hero grew daily more hollow-eyed, more wan, more languid. She noticed that her meals were scarcely touched; that she started at the most trifling noise; and that she frequently lapsed into silence and abstraction. Her cousin watched assiduously for an opportunity of speaking in private with her, and at last determined to take a bold measure, which should secure to them an uninterrupted interview, besides affording the means of remaining with Hero long enough to comfort and reassure her.

When the angular duenna left her for the night, and when a sufficient time had elapsed to give warrant for supposing that all within the castle had retired to rest—she got up, and made her way through the passages and galleries to Hero's room.

She stole through the darkness—for she would not take the lamp with her, lest she should betray her procedure—glided down the dark staircase, and found her way into the corridor below. She crept along, carefully counting the doors as she passed, that she might be sure of the one belonging to Hero's chamber; and when she reached it, she opened it softly, and spoke, that her cousin might at once recognize her voice.

"Is it possible! Dear, dear Beatrice! Is that you?" exclaimed Hero, starting up at the welcome sound, and clinging to her cousin with delight.

"To be sure! to be sure! It is I! Who should it be, you foolish trembler?"

"But I've had such terrible dreams, Beatrice;" whispered Hero. "If you only knew! Here get into bed; you'll take cold. How good you are to come to me! And through those long dark passages, too! Oh, how brave of you to venture—and how kind, for my sake! Dear, dear Beatrice!" As Hero hugged her cousin, and nestled close to her, she again whispered of the fearful dreams she had had.

"One, in particular. I must tell you, Beatrice, how dreadful it was, that you may own it was enough to make any one a coward, to behold such fearful things. I thought I had offended aunt Giustina by coming down very late—so late, that she was sitting at the table, ready for dinner instead of for breakfast. I saw her sign to Domenico, the old seneschal, who opened that low door, studded with iron, beneath the great staircase. I saw dark steep steps leading downwards, and thought they led to some vaulted dungeons beneath the chapel. The seneschal went on in silence, then he seemed to fade away, and instead of him, I saw my father standing at a little distance, before me. He beckoned to me, looking smiling and happy; and then I saw that there was a crowd of people standing about him, all very gaily dressed, as if for some festal occasion; the underground vaults had disappeared; and I was in the chapel brilliantly lighted—the high altar dressed—a venerable priest standing near it. I saw you, Beatrice. You were, like my father, smiling, and looking joyfully towards me. I found that I had a long white veil on; but I don't think I was going to be a nun. My father took my hand, and kissed my forehead, and led me towards the altar; but just as I had come within a pace of it, something seemed to rise out of the earth—very ghastly and hideous. I couldn't rightly make out what it was—a figure—a shape—I cannot describe it;—but I felt it to be something monstrous—unspeakably horrible and loathly. I recoiled; and turned towards my father, to take refuge in his arms—and oh, Beatrice! That was worst of all! I thought he shrank from me—as if I had somehow acquired part of the loathliness of this thing—whatever it was. I cast my eyes towards you, Beatrice. You were looking very sorrowful, and yet angry. Then the whole scene swam before my eyes; I seemed to be

falling, falling, falling, down an immeasurable depth, I knew not whither. I struggled; and awoke striving to cry out. My face was covered with tears, and I lay bathed in an agony of terror. Oh, such nights as I have spent in this fearful castle!"

"You shall spend no more such! At least, if my lying by your side can prevent your imagination from playing you such painful tricks as these, my poor Hero!" said her cousin. "I will steal down from my room each night, as soon as dragoness Prisca leaves me; and then we'll sleep cosily together, holding the ghosts at bay till cock-crow; when you know they take their flight from earth, as I will to my own room again, in time to dress for breakfast."

"Dear coz! And then you will be sure to call me early, and make me get up," said Hero.

As she spoke, Beatrice started up in bed, and remained motionless.

"What? What? Do you see something? Do you hear anything?" whispered Hero.

"No, no;" replied Beatrice; but Hero felt that she trembled.

"I fear—it is my fault—the lamp!" exclaimed Beatrice. "Do you not perceive a strong smell of burning, Hero?"

"Certainly—yes—I surely do!" returned Hero.

"Now there is real danger show yourself a brave girl, dear coz;" said Beatrice. "You who have owned to being a coward about ghosts, will yet prove yourself of good courage in the hour most needful. I fear the castle is on fire. Get up; dress yourself quickly; make the best of your way downstairs; across the hall, into the offices, and rouse the household. I will join you as soon as possible."

"Are you not going with me?" said Hero, who had sprung out of bed, and was obeying her cousin's directions with an alacrity that showed she really had the presence of mind in this moment of actual peril, which had failed her under an imaginary fear.

"No; I must go upstairs—I must see whether it be my own folly—my own imprudence——"

Beatrice hurried away, wholly possessed with the one thought of ascertaining whether it was owing to her having left the lamp burning, that the fire had broken out. This strange irrational

reasoning is a not unfrequent concomitant of a sudden alarm of fire. People have been known to waste their energies upon preserving the veriest rubbish, committing all kinds of vagaries, both of thought and deed, in the trepidation of such a moment. So it was with Beatrice; she could not divest herself of the feeling that it was her imperative duty to go back to her room, and see whether it was her carelessness that had caused this calamity. But when she reached her own room—and beheld the lamp safely standing where she had left it—and had ejaculated one fervent exclamation of thanksgiving at finding that she had not herself to reproach, her next thought was of her aunt! Lady Giustina—old—sleeping apart—in that lonely turret—none to warn her—to arouse her!

Beatrice flew back along the passages; enabled to use greater speed than before, by the terrible light that now began to glare upon her path. Through the loopholes in the gallery-wall she caught glimpses of the red glow that seemed to fill the air outside. She reached her aunt's chamber-door. She waited for no ceremonial knock; but opened softly, lifted the tapestry, and entered. The room was in perfect stillness. Its mistress lay in a deep sleep. Beatrice leaned over lady Giustina, whispering, "Awake, dear aunt, awake!"

The countess opened her eyes, fixed them on the beautiful young face hanging over her, and said, "Already morning, darling?—And so my Beatrice is come, as usual, to help me arise. Methought I dreamed a long and ugly dream, that you were gone from me, my Beatrice!"

The tenderness in the tone,—the name,—the fond look—all told Beatrice that the old countess's thoughts had gone back, in the first confused perceptions of awakening, to that period of her life when her other Beatrice, her own child-niece, used daily to awaken her, hanging lovingly over her.

"Dear aunt! It is not morning. It is night. But there is danger. You must get up. Let me lead you away."

The old countess passed her hand across her eyes; and seemed struggling to reduce her scattered thoughts to order. When she withdrew her hand, her face wore its accustomed calmly-severe aspect; but her lips had turned deathly white.

"How came you here, maiden?" she said sternly. "I know you now! You looked for the moment like one I——. How came you to venture hither, child? I love not intruders in my room. No one ever enters here unbidden. Begone, child!"

"It is no time to obey you now, aunt. You must rise,—and quickly. Listen, dear aunt; understand me; the castle is on fire, and we shall hardly get forth in time!"

Lady Giustina's habitual self-command came to her aid. She got up, threw on a dressing-gown, put her feet into slippers, and went with a firm unhurried step towards the door of the apartment, beckoning Beatrice to accompany her, with her usual air of calm authority. But on issuing out upon the landing at the head of the winding-stairs, she perceived the smoke rising in volumes, and could hear the roaring of the flames below. Another moment or two, and the flames caught to the first steps of the staircase, and sent their spiral tongues darting and threatening up the interior of the turret.

Beatrice cast one look at the impassable gulf beneath them; her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth; her lips seemed suddenly bereft of all moisture, her throat was parched; but she uttered no sound. She fixed her eyes upon her aunt's face, mutely took her hand between both hers, and grasped it very tight.

"Brave wench!" exclaimed the old countess, as she returned the firm pressure. "And must she perish? So young! So brave! So beautiful!" Her voice sank to a whisper as she added, "*Her* child!"

Beatrice found voice to say, "Since we must die, let the child hear you pardon her mother."

"My vow to heaven—I took a vow I would never more behold that face——" murmured the aged countess. "Never pardon——"

"Heaven absolves you from it by the lips of her child," said Beatrice earnestly. "Pronounce her forgiveness."

At that moment there was a sound at one of the windows. Backed by the red glare outside, Beatrice could perceive the dark figure of a man, attempting to effect an entrance through the casement. It was Pietro, one of the countess's faithful

retainers, who had reared a scaling-ladder against the wall of the turret, and had climbed up, to attempt the rescue of his aged mistress.

"See, aunt! There is help at hand! They are coming to save us!" Beatrice sprang to the casement to unfasten it.

"The countess! My lady!—where is she?" shouted the man, as he leaped into the chamber. "Quick, quick, madam! For the love of heaven! Trust yourself in my arms—with the help of the Almighty I shall be able to lift you down to earth in safety! Come, madam!"

But lady Giustina drew back. "Her child! Save her! Save Beatrice!" exclaimed the aged countess, pointing to her niece.

"By your leave, my lady, I save none, till I have saved yourself;" said Pietro sturdily.

"Pietro," said his mistress, with that voice of stern decision which none around her dared oppose, "I charge you on your fealty, do as I command. Save her—save the child of one I loved better than myself,—and if it be God's will that I should also be preserved, return for me!"

"There will be scant time!" muttered Pietro. "But be it as your ladyship wills." And he turned to where the young girl stood.

But Beatrice in her turn refused to be rescued first.

Pietro, merely saying, "My lady must not be gainsaid," lifted Beatrice in one of his stalwart arms, climbed the window-sill; firmly planted his foot upon the first rung of the ladder; and commenced his descent.

As the man appeared from the window, with his human burden, there arose an irrepressible shout from those anxiously assembled below; but the next instant it was hushed; a solemn silence took its place, as breathlessly his progress was watched. Pietro bore her carefully, steadily. They were still some feet from the ground, when Beatrice threw herself out of his arms, exclaiming, "Return! return! Go up again! Hasten! hasten!"

The man needed no urging; he had scarcely felt himself freed from his load, ere he was re-mounting towards the turret-window.

Intensely the watching eyes beneath, followed Pietro's every movement, as he neared the burning window. They saw him gain it,—boldly step in,—into the very midst of the smoke and flames.

A pause ensued, of unspeakable suspense.

The next moment, a tremendous rushing sound—a crumbling and mighty yielding—and then the floor sank in burning ruins, the roof collapsed, and fell in, leaving the outer walls of the turret a mere shell, from which spouted forth a volume of fire, waving and flaming upward in fatal splendour.

A cry of horror burst from the crowd of faithful retainers; while the two cousins clung to each other, weeping and awe-stricken.

The morning dawned upon the ruins of Montaspro. The old seneschal asked the young ladies if they would not have a messenger despatched to Messina, that the lord governor might be informed of the calamity which had befallen; and that he might come and fetch away his daughter and niece from so melancholy a scene.

"Dear Beatrice," said Hero, "let us leave it at once. We shall arrive at home as soon as the messenger. Let us go home without delay. I sigh to be at home. I pine for home."

"If there were but means——" began Beatrice.

"The litter and mules are safe, young lady;" said Domenico. "The outhouses where they were bestowed have escaped the fire. There is naught need detain you in this scene of desolation. I will undertake that all diligent search be made for the remains of mine honoured mistress, and see that all care be taken to give them reverent obsequy."

"Be it so, good Domenico," said Hero. "Bid them harness; in less than half an hour, my cousin and I will be ready to set forth."

The sun had scarcely arisen, when the little train wound along the mountain path leading from Montaspro. The blackened, and still smoking walls, lay a disfigured heap. The bright gilding of the morning beams, the smiling beauty of the azure sky, seemed a mockery, as they hung over the castle ruins smouldering within this gloomy mountain gorge.

Worn out with the fatigues and excitement of the past night, the young girls fell asleep.

Some hours must have elapsed; for when Beatrice awoke, she saw that the sun was high in the heavens. Hero still slept; and her cousin, unwilling to disturb her, watched in silence.

The mules were slowly toiling up a long rise; the attendants were strolling on leisurely a-head; when Beatrice, attracted by the leafy coolness of a grove of trees that skirted the road, felt inclined to walk awhile, that she might the more entirely enjoy their shade. She softly unfastened the door of the litter without awakening her cousin, and sprang lightly to the ground. A moment she lingered, to feast her eyes upon the glorious prospect; yet a moment longer she lingered, when her attention was caught by a purple cluster of grapes, that nestled amid some vine-leaves, drooping just above her head. The thought of the refreshment they would be to her cousin on awakening from sleep, made her long to gather them. As she scrambled up the tangled bank where they grew, she became suddenly aware of two strange faces that peered at her from above. They were hung about with black elf-locks of matted hair, and had eyes that sparkled with mingled keenness and ferocity. These two faces kept an unwinking gaze fastened upon Beatrice, that made her feel she was the undoubted object of their watch. Her heart beat, as the thought of Hero's tales of banditti crossed her mind; but hastily resolving that her best chance of safety was to behave as if they were harmless peasants, she said, as she nodded up in their direction:—"Good-day, friends! I suppose this ground is no enclosed vineyard; and that it is hardly a theft for a thirsty traveller to help herself to a handful of fruit?"

The men came crashing and bursting through the foliage towards her. They were tall stout fellows, in mountaineer garb, with broad shady hats, and knives in their girdles.

"It's not for us to decide too strictly on what's theft, and what's not, young lady;" laughed one of them; "but it's my notion that all things by the road-side, come fairly to hand, if so be that a man can lay hands on them. What say you, Matteo?"

"Truly, I think that's sound law, brother;" grinned the other.

"And so you're a traveller, are you, signorina? As sure as my name's Filippino, I'd ha' been bound,—no,—I'd ha' wagered, you didn't belong hereabouts. And yet you're not on foot, neither; those little feet would never ha' brought you far. No, no, you can't be on foot. It's my opinion that you have only just stepped out of yonder litter, trotting down hill, there; and that it's in that you've been travelling."

"Well guessed;" said Beatrice; "and I'll thank you, friend, to add to your courtesies, by shouting to that same litter, that it may stop for me. Your voice will carry farther than mine, I fancy."

"It'll outscream an eagle, in general, signorina; but I'm afeard I've got a hoarseness, just now;" said the man, leering facetiously.

"And my throat is well enough in a barcarola, but tells for nothing in a shout;" said his companion. "It's a good singing-voice, but a bad speaking-voice."

"So I hear;" replied Beatrice. "I'll try my own." And she suddenly gave a loud ringing call; but it failed to reach those to whom it was addressed. She could see the litter and the attendant horsemen still plodding on.

One of the men started, half drew his knife, and muttered a curse; but the other laughed, and said:—"Don't be in a hurry to leave us, signorina; we can't part with you yet. It isn't every day we have the honour of seeing the governor of Messina's daughter in our mountain solitudes."

"And now we'll make him not only thank us, but pay us, for returning her to him safely;" said the other. "But come, signorina, you must go see our captain."

"Since you're so hospitably pressing," said Beatrice; "come, then, lead me to your captain."

She saw that there was no escape from these masnadieri. She saw that she might preserve Hero from the fright and possible peril of capture, if she maintained their delusion with respect to her identity; she therefore resolved to go bravely through with the adventure.

The two men walked on either side of her, leading the way through the grove of trees. It thickened into a close wood;

but the men threaded their way unhesitatingly, amid all the intricacies of bush and brier; until at length they came to a comparatively open space. In the midst, on the margin of a small lake, there stood an old dismantled watch-tower. Its roof was open to the sky; its walls were rent and ruined; and it was covered with ivy and other parasitical plants that flourish on decay.

Beatrice, struck with the romantic beauty of the spot, said:—"If that be your captain's abode, he hath commendable taste in a house, so far as site is concerned; but methinks he might keep it in better repair, with stronger chance of in-door comfort."

"He hath a solider roof than one of masonry, for his abiding-place;" said Filippino, as he struck three smart blows against a rock. A portal, so artificially constructed, that it seemed like a portion of the solid crag itself, receded at the signal, and gave entrance to a cavern. Beatrice, on being led in, found herself in an arched space, that seemed like a vast hall supported by irregular pillars. At the farther end, several men were employed spreading a board with food and wine; while near to them paced a man with folded arms, and lowering brow, as if lost in moody thought. Beatrice's conductors went towards their chief, and exchanged a few hasty words with him. The short colloquy ended by his saying, in a harsh voice, as he flung himself on a kind of settle, "Bring her hither."

The two men returned to Beatrice, and said:—"Our captain desires to speak with you, young lady."

"Is it thus your captain receives his guests?" said Beatrice. "Scant courtesy, methinks, to loll there, and send a message, instead of stepping forward to greet them himself. The welcome they meet, tempts few to visit here a second time, I imagine."

"Few visit us at all, by their own good will;" grinned Filippino; it taketh some persuasion,—not to say force,—to prevail upon travellers to become our guests."

"Your people lack discipline, signor capitano," said Beatrice, advancing; "you should teach them better manners, than to keep a young lady waiting in the entrance, while they parley

with their master; and they would doubtless learn to doff their hats in her presence, were they to see you set them an example," added she, glancing at the broad beaver which shaded his brow.

Involuntarily,—in his surprise at her coolness,—the man's hand stole to his hat, and lifted it from his head; but he was yet more surprised to see the young girl quietly seat herself beside him upon the settle, saying:—"Well; they told me you wanted to speak to me. What have you to say?"

"I am in the habit of putting questions, not of answering them, young lady;" said the man sternly. "Those who are brought before me, stand there, and reply, in lieu of sitting here, questioning me."

"I sit here from no wish to come so close, believe me;" answered she; "but I saw no other seat at hand, and I am tired with my ramble. If you have not the courtesy to offer me a chair, I must help myself, and take one. That is the mode here, I fancy."

"We have learned to help ourselves, since none will help us;" said the robber-chief, in his harsh voice. "I see you guess our calling. We live upon what we can seize, or extort, from the fears of those who have made us outcasts. Trusty Filippino and Matteo saw the litter approaching this morning; watched; saw that it contained only yourself and your sick cousin,—she is your cousin, is she not?"

"Yes; but I don't see how her being my cousin gives you a right to way-lay me;" said Beatrice.

"They guessed that to plunder the litter would profit them little;" proceeded the captain. "But on recognizing one of them for the governor of Messina's daughter, they knew they could secure heavy ransom. This is our object, I tell you honestly."

"Your words are more honest than your deeds, then, signor capitano;" said she.

"Young lady, I'm a plain man, and——"

"I see you are;" interrupted Beatrice.

"I'm a plain man, who speak my plain mind; and I tell you——"

"If person and mind are both so ill-favoured, the less shown of either the better;" said she.

His lip struggled with a smile, as the captain went on:—"I tell you, young lady, ransom we are determined to have; and you will be detained here as hostage until such time as we are in possession of the sum."

"Best send me to fetch it," said Beatrice.

"That would show less wit on our part than you have shown on yours, young lady;" answered the man; his forbidding look visibly relaxing beneath the sunshine of the young girl's playful manner. "We will not fail to obtain your ransom; meantime, signorina, you must be content to remain here our prisoner, though you shall have all courteous treatment."

"That is glad hearing; if it be only as a welcome change from what I have already had;" said she. "Suppose you begin your courtesy by offering me something to eat and drink; for I am half-famished."

"We were about to sit down to our noontide meal when you entered. Will you share it with us?" said the brigand.

"It will be the first stolen dinner I ever ate; it should needs be sweet. I suppose you dispense with grace-saying here, since all your meals are graceless. No offence, I hope, gentlemen."

"Corpo di Bellona! a spirited young devil she is!" exclaimed one of the men enthusiastically. "I would thou wert a few years older, little one, and thou shouldst stay here, and be our queen! 'Tis a million pities thou'rt not old enough to marry our captain, and share his sway! Corpo di Bacco! I'll drink your health, young lady!"

"Fill me a cup, and I'll pledge you all, good gentlemen;" said Beatrice. "But I have no ambition to be your queen. I should soon be an unpopular monarch among you, for I should begin my rule by reforming your ways. No molestation of peaceful travellers—no way-laying of unoffending passengers—no detaining people against their will, and extorting unjust ransoms from their anxious friends. Liberty, not licence, on the road, should then be your maxim; and I would make you observe, what now I only give you as a toast—'Freedom for *all* upon the highway!'"

She nodded gracefully round to them, as she put her lips to the wine-cup; and the robbers shouted a loud 'Evviva!' to her honour.

"And now, as I am a prisoner, a dungeon is to be my withdrawing-room, I presume;" she said. "Let me begone to it at once, for I am not accustomed to the prolonged dinner-table you doubtless favour. Use no ceremony with me, I beg. Pray do not think of rising from table one moment before your usual time, on my account; but let me retire."

Filippino led Beatrice out of the cavern hall. They passed through a long subterranean passage, at the end of which were some rude steps that communicated with the basement of the old watch-tower. In one of the upper chambers, her conductor left her, after an ostentatious drawing of bolts, and fastening of chains on the outside, that she might hear she was securely locked in.

It was late in the afternoon when she was awakened from a refreshing sleep by the unfastening of her prison-door, and the entrance of Filippino.

"I have brought you some supper, young lady;" he said; "and I am but a rough chambermaid, but I'll try and make your bed a bit tidy for you. You see, the last gentleman that slept here, left his bedclothes rather in a tumble. He was roused up on a sudden—on particular business—but he slept sound ever after. He was never disturbed again—never wakened no more."

"He was despatched to a better rest than any to be found under this roof, hospitable as it may be, I suppose;" said Beatrice, as she watched the man, smoothing the rags and coarse linen that lay heaped on the pallet.

"You needn't fear resting, mind;" said Filippino, "nor disturbing neither. You'll not be roused like the gentleman, nor sent to rest as he was. You'll not be wanted on the business he was wanted for. You've friends to pay your price for you."

"That's one of the comforts of being a helpless girl;" said she; "I needn't take care of myself. It's almost a pity though, for my friends' sake, that I'm not a worthless girl, for then they needn't buy me back."

"If they're of my mind, they won't grudge a good round sum

for such a brave-hearted little creature as you. Per Bacco! What a glorious robber you'd make!"

"Should I?"

"Yes, that you would. Maledetto! I could find in my heart to curse and swear, when I think of such an amazon spirit as that, going back to be quenched and dulled in a round of stupid fine-lady existence, instead of staying here to spend a free roving life worthy of it. It's enough to make a man blaspheme, to think of the crosses of fate! That you should be doomed to pass through life a governor's daughter, when you would have made such a noble masnadiera!"

"Never mind, Filippino;" returned she laughing; "we must be resigned to things as they are. We can only learn to submit with the best grace we can muster, and settle them as we best may. Here, accommodate me by drinking this flagon of wine; it is a superfluous part of the supper you have kindly brought, as regards me; but by taking the disposal of it on you, you may please both yourself and me."

"There again! What a hand you'd be at dividing spoil! Such notions of justness and fitness as you have, to be wasted on civilized society—where everything's adjusted for you! Now in our way o' life, they'd have had such fine scope! Destiny ought to be ashamed of itself, for thwarting Nature at this rate. Why, you were born for a leader of banditti—if you'd only been a boy; and Fortune's a cross-grained jade, to have made you a young lady and a governor's daughter."

"Nay, there's a consoling point in most things—a bright side to almost everything, good Filippino;" said Beatrice; "perhaps, after all, those very notions of justice and fitness you speak of, might have interfered to prevent my making so good a bandit-chief as you're pleased to fancy. I might have some foolish scruples, and troublesome fastidiousnesses touching right and wrong, that would probably have spoiled me for a robber."

"Not a bit of it; you'd soon have got the better of them. Don't tell me; I know you're just the right stuff to make a highwayman of."

"But supposing I had in time overcome early prejudices; learned to see right and wrong in their true light, perceiving

that it was right to take from others what I could have by force, and wrong to leave them in possession of what I could extort; that I had acquired wider principles on the subject of property, than the old strict ones in which I was brought up, yet even then, I fear me, I should have made but a sorry bandit. No, no; let me not aspire too high. Disappointed ambition is misery. Since I cannot hope to be a worthy thief, let me rest contented with mine own station."

"Well, you may take it as you will, but I shall never cease to regret that you were born a lady, when you might have been a brigand," said Filippino. "Cospetto! Che vergogna! Che peccato! But it can't be helped! Buona notte, signorina. Felice notte!"

"Felice notte!" echoed Beatrice. "Good night, good Filippino. May thy dreams be undisturbed by regrets for me."

"Felice notte!" repeated Filippino, as he withdrew, muttering, "Ma che peccato!"

When she was again left to herself, Beatrice for the first time felt a little down-hearted. Night was coming on; here, in this wild place, a sense of loneliness, of unprotectedness, crept over her; and she sat, for a space, lost in saddened thought. Then she took some of the bread and fruit from the supper Filippino had brought, and took them to the deep window-ledge, and eat them there, that her eyes might imbibe comfort and hope, from the view of Nature in her serene aspect. The moon had risen, and the lovely sequestered spot lay steeped in her soft beams. The lake was like a mirror, save where the night breeze from the mountain gently stirred its surface, and caused the planets' rays to be reflected in silvery undulation.

As she gazed, the thought of her friends, of what would be her uncle Leonato's solicitude, her uncle Antonio's uneasiness, and, above all, Hero's misery, at her prolonged absence, made her writhe with impatience at her captivity; and, in an irresistible impulse of longing to get to them, she clutched at one of the bars of the iron grating before her. To her surprise and delight it moved beneath her grasp. She felt it sensibly give way. She applied all her strength in pulling at it. It yielded more and more; and at length she succeeded in wrenching it

out of its rusty socket, entirely. Its removal afforded space sufficient for her to pass her body through the opening thus made; but the difficulty now was, to avail herself of this egress. The bedclothes torn into lengths, and fastened together, might form a means of letting herself down outside; but she remembered that the watch-tower stood immediately on the brink of the lake, and she was uncertain whether the walls might not go sheer down into the water. She determined to try, however She set to work with energy in forming her knotted ladder. She fastened one end securely to the grating. She then lowered it out; crept through the opening of the grating, and trusted herself to the strength of the new-made rope. Firmly she clung to her bedclothes-ladder, carefully letting herself down from knot to knot, until at length she found that she was within a few feet of the bottom of the tower. With an inward aspiration she quitted her hold, and fell safely to the ground. Before endeavouring to regain her feet, she lay still for a moment, that she might recover from the giddiness that she felt; and then she leaned over the grassy edge, and dipped her hands in the cold water, and laved some on her face; and then the giddiness passed quite off.

With great care she made her way along the grassy ledge that margined the lake, until at length, she reached a spot where the ground widened, and she could tread with freedom. She had nothing to guide her in the choice of a path; but any direction seemed well, so that it led away from the tower walls. She struck at once across a grassy plain, as much as possible within the shadow of the trees, that her progress might be unnoted, should there be any stragglers of the troop abroad. The moon shone high in the heavens; the warm breath of a Sicilian night was tempered by a certain freshness in the air, that seemed to tell her she was approaching the sea. She had hardly recognized this,—ere she came upon a sight at once lovely and sublime. Between an arched opening of the rocks, she saw down, many feet below, the calm blue sea, sleeping beneath the moonbeams, its broad expanse stretching away, far as eye could reach; and to the extreme right arose majestic Ætna, crowned with volcanic fires.

Beatrice seated herself in a hollow of the rock, that she might rest herself, and contemplate at ease this superb spectacle; and when she resumed her way, she determined she would endeavour,—by keeping Ætna immediately behind her, and the sea on her right hand,—to shape her course northward, which she knew would then be the direction of Messina. She wandered on for some hours; having lost all trace of whether she were pursuing her homeward way, when, just as day broke, she discovered, to her great mortification, that she was not far from the spot where she had yesterday morning first encountered the two robbers. She could not be mistaken; there was the road, winding down the declivity, where she had last seen the litter, trotting away in the distance, hopelessly unhearing of her cry to stop; there was the tangled bank, up which she had scrambled to pluck the fruit for Hero; there the very spot whence she had beheld the brigands' faces glaring down upon her. The thought that even now they might be watching her, filled her with such alarm and fresh energy that she ran, with her best speed, down the hill. She had reached the foot of the descent, when she saw a man with a sickle in his hand; there was a mule beside him, fastened to a tree, grazing; and into the large baskets that were slung on either side of the animal, the man was loading the green fodder as he reaped. He was shouting a rustic song, in broad Sicilian dialect, at the full stretch of his lungs. His garb was coarse; and his look was unmistakably countrified. "He looks safely a peasant,—a rude peasant—I may surely trust him;" thought Beatrice, as she eyed the man, who looked up at her approaching step.

"Hallo, little one! Where did you start from? From the earth, or from the clouds? Out of breath, panting, dusty! Are you pursued?"

"Not pursued, but afraid of being pursued,—almost as bad, good friend;" she said. "Will you be my friend, and help me to escape being caught, as well as the dread of catching?"

"Have you been doing anything amiss? Have you run away from rightful punishment—from your true friends?"

"I have been seized by the masnadieri,—have made my escape from them. Hide me, good man; give me rest and

shelter for awhile, and then be my guide to Messina,—to my home,—where you shall have both thanks and reward."

"Softly, softly, little one! how glibly your tongue runs on;" said the peasant. "Let me understand this matter. You have been taken by the masnadieri. Good. You want to get away from them; very natural. They want to keep you; very fair. I want to please both parties; very right. If I manage your escape, unknown to them, well and good in all ways; you are saved, and they remain unoffended,—that's the main thing."

"And how is this to be done? Quick, quick, good man! They may even now be upon us."

"'Tis for that very reason, I must contrive a way to take you home unseen, little one;" said the peasant; "it is at some distance, and on your way there, we might, as likely as not, stumble upon one or other of the signori briganti. Here, step into this basket; you will ride softly and easily upon this couch of new-cut grass, and I will cover you lightly over with more, so that no matter whom we meet, my mule will seem to carry a no less innocent load than green fodder. 'Mind appearances' is a good rule for passing through life safely and well."

"You are full of beneficial rules for self-regulation, good man," said Beatrice laughing, as she stepped into the pannier. "Now, be a little practical in your measures; put some stones in the opposite basket, that it may weigh down the grave charge you consent to carry in this one. Wear a show of equity, at least, before the world."

"Mayhap you think I ought to beware how I burthen my conscience with a deception;" grinned the man, as he began to pile the grass over the bright face of the young girl that was smiling up at him from amidst the green heap; "if so, step out again, and save me from sin."

"'Tis thy mule bears the burthen, not thy soul, man;" replied she; "thou saddl'st the sin,—if sin there be,—not upon thy conscience, but upon thy beast's back, and so shift'st it from thine own shoulders, like the wise man thou hast proclaimed thyself to be, in thy rules for self-government and advantage."

The peasant, after putting the final touch to his arrangements,

led the animal by the rein; with an easy air full of virtuous unconsciousness, resuming his rustic song, as he went his way.

It was not long ere he had occasion to rejoice at his forethought.

A voice called lustily after him:—"Girolamo! Ohe! Girolamo!"

"Ah, messer Matteo! Bon giorno!" said the peasant, turning to salute the bandit with every appearance of hearty greeting; "you are early abroad this morning. Ah, well. Early industry makes wealth betimes. The ready hand comes soon to gain. Eh, messer Matteo? Excellent rules all."

"You're a shrewd dog, master Girolamo;" answered Matteo, with a sly glance, "but let's to business. Our people got hold of a young girl yesterday, none other than the governor of Messina's daughter. It stands to reason that we ought to get a good ransom for such as she, and we took care of her, according. But see the heartlessness of the world! When Filippino went to look in upon her at day-break, just to see that she was all safe and comfortable, he found the bird flown; and I was despatched to try and bring her back to cage. You haven't happened to see her pass by, have you, Girolamo?" continued Matteo, twitching out one or two of the blades of grass that overhung the basket in which Beatrice lay ensconced. "A little gay-eyed, red-lipped thing, that looks too bright and fearless to mind anything. She seems not to know what tears mean; and as if neither harm nor sorrow could ever come near her. She speaks up so open, and looks so straight into your face, that you feel as if she must be right and you wrong; which isn't altogether pleasant, though it isn't altogether unpleasant,—to look at."

"Just such a child as you describe, I saw, this very morning, not half an hour ago;" said the peasant. "She was wandering about. I questioned her, as in duty bound. She told me she had made her escape from your hands. I washed mine of the concern, as became me. I said you would not approve of my helping her away, if it should come to your ears that I had done so; and that I liked to live in peace with my neighbours."

"Well said, good Girolamo;" said Matteo; "our captain

shall know of the good turn you have done him. And so you left the little one to do as well as she could. Quite right. And whereabouts was this?"

"Close by; just up there, yonder;" said the peasant, scrupulously pointing to the spot where the colloquy had taken place between himself and Beatrice.

"And you think I shall find her there still?" said Matteo.

"She can't have got far;" replied Girolamo. "I shouldn't wonder, but she's crouching among the long grass; hiding somewhere quite near, I'll be bound."

"Thanks, good friend, I'll not forget to report you to our captain; and, in return for your neighbourliness, it shall go hard but we'll spare you a token of our good-will out of the chit's ransom, when it is ours;" said the robber, as he strode off in the direction pointed out.

"I'm much bounden to you, messer Matteo," said the peasant; "lest I seem selfish, I'll not say I wish you may get it."

And coolly taking up his song again at the very note of the tune where he had been interrupted, the phlegmatic Girolamo jogged on by the side of his mule as before. For some time, they went on thus; Beatrice peering through the wicker framework, and getting sufficient air to prevent her smothering in her green nest; which, baked through and through by the sun, now mounted high into the heavens, became somewhat oppressive; but the motion was easy, and she had the pleasant feeling that she was snugly and securely making her way homewards.

Leonato was perturbedly pacing up and down one of his saloons, anxiously hoping for news of his lost niece. Ever since the previous evening, the palace had been a scene of distraction. Hero had arrived in the greatest distress, bringing the news of the calamity at Montaspro, and of her cousin's unaccountable disappearance. On awakening, she had missed Beatrice from her side; but at first imagined that she had merely got out to walk for a while. She had caused the litter to halt, hoping every instant to see her cousin come up with it; but after lingering in vain, till there could be no longer any doubt that Beatrice must have lost her way, Hero had hurried

home to Messina, that her father might take instant and effectual means for having their dear one sought and recovered.

As yet no intelligence had returned; and Leonato was still in all the grief for the countess Giustina's untimely fate, divided by his suspense respecting Beatrice, when an attendant hastily entered the saloon, to say, that there was a peasant mountaineer in the courtyard, insisting upon seeing his lordship, the lord governor of Messina himself.

"Perchance he brings news of my niece; bring him hither; why did you not admit him at once?"

"My lord, he will neither be brought hither, nor admitted, nor anything else;" said the attendant. "He will not wait upon your lordship; but says forsooth your lordship must come down to him, as he can't leave his mule. The rascal rustic! Had we not feared that he might bring news of my young lady Beatrice, which we might lose, an' we turned him away, he should soon have seen the outside of the palace-gates."

Half of the attendant's ireful speech at this insult to his master's dignity was lost to Leonato, who had hurried to the courtyard as soon as he had gathered that the peasant would only tell what he had to say to himself.

"I am come to offer you a bargain, my lord governor; will you buy this load of green hay? Will you give me a fair price for it?" he said.

"I will give thee thine own price for it, good fellow, if, as I hope, thou bring'st me news of my lost niece, my Beatrice. Tell me what thou know'st of her. Speak, man!" said Leonato, eagerly.

"If I bring you better than news of her, my lord? What if I bring you herself?" said Girolamo.

"Where is she? Where have you left her?" said Leonato.

"What price shall I say for the green hay, my lord governor?" said the peasant. "Any price is no price; best fix the sum."

"Name it thyself, fellow. What thou wilt. But Beatrice—you say you have brought her—where does she tarry—why is not she home? She was ever all impatience to fly to me."

"She has had much ado to restrain it;" said Beatrice, springing up, throwing off the heap of green fodder, and leaping from the midst of it into her uncle's embrace.

Girolamo, handsomely rewarded, made his parting obeisances, and took his departure towards his mountain home.

An expected guest, don Pedro of Aragon, arrives. He is a valued friend of Leonato's; a noble gentleman, full of honour and high principle. He brings with him his brother, don John; a gentleman of temper as unhappy as his origin. His tastes are degraded, his nature crafty, and his manners morose. But don Pedro permits his accompanying him, that a better example may serve to wean him from the unworthy society he has hitherto frequented.

The brothers were attended, each by their several followers. Don Pedro had a large retinue; with one confidential servant, named Balthazar. This Balthazar was a staid, worthy man; he was much respected by the prince his master, and he possessed one accomplishment which won him his especial favour. Balthazar was an admirable musician; he played on the lute with great skill, and possessed a charming tenor voice.

Don John's attendant was named Borachio; a dissolute fellow, who passed for very good-looking, among the tribe of susceptible serving-damsels.

One of the lady Hero's women, Margaret, was smitten on the spot. The instant she beheld this irresistible gentleman's gentleman, she fell desperately in love. She coquetted, she 'kept company with him;' though she held him aloof all the while; prudently resolving not to give up so good a situation as she enjoyed with her young mistress, the governor of Messina's daughter, by a marriage with a roving blade, who might desert her the next week to follow his master's fortunes.

This flirtation cost the sober, serious Balthazar many a pang. With all his sobriety and gravity, he could not resist the captivation of the smart damsel, Margaret. He loved her against his better sense. But all his love, strong as it was, availed him nothing. It could not win him one smile from her whose whole stock was lavished upon the showy, rakish Borachio.

But the love-affairs of the hall and ante-chamber need be no farther adverted to.

Don Pedro's visit to his old friend at Messina had lasted about a month, when one morning a young officer arrived at the governor's palace, inquiring for the prince, and announcing that he brought news from the army to his highness.

It happened that don Pedro, with signor Benedick, signor Leonato, signor Antonio, Gaetano, and Beatrice, had ridden forth on a short excursion in the neighbourhood, to visit some classic remains of great beauty.

The young soldier,—who had announced his name as count Claudio, saying that he would await the return of don Pedro,—was shown into one of the saloons; which chanced to be a favourite sitting-room of the two young lady-cousins. It opened into a large conservatory, full of rare flowers and plants. In this saloon sat the young officer for some time, listlessly turning over a large portfolio of engravings that lay open on a stand; when his attention was attracted by the sound of a voice, singing a little quiet song, in that sort of busy idleness, and occupied leisure, which employs the fingers, while it leaves the thoughts and voice free to move to music.

He held his breath, and listened. Yes, it was a soft womanly voice, sweet and clear, singing very near to him. It seemed to proceed from the conservatory. He was sitting not far from the open door which led directly into it; but he saw mirrored in a tall Venetian glass that covered a large portion of the wall opposite to him, a complete picture of the interior of the conservatory, which he could contemplate without stirring from the position he occupied.

It presented to him, amid the profusion of foliage and blossoms, the figure of a young girl; graceful, beautiful, blooming as themselves. She had a light but capacious basket on one arm; into which she dropped the flowers as she cut them. She was culling them with some niceness; for she went on cropping flower after flower; now reaching up after some half-blown favourite, now plunging amid a thicket of leaves, now pressing through stem and spray for some choice bud, or selected beauty. And ever as she proceeded in her fragrant task, she

murmured her low liquid carol, with tones as sweet and full as were the perfumes and colours she collected.

The young officer sat entranced, watching her. Count Claudio was not of a disposition to be troubled by any refinement, such as might have prompted a nature of more scrupulous delicacy than his, to step forward and announce his presence to the young lady. He was a man of the world, a soldier, with certain accomplishments of person and manner that made him pass for a very pleasant, gentlemanly youth; he thought the young girl made an exceedingly pretty picture, bending among her plants and flowers; and he had no hesitation in gazing on it as long as he pleased,—which was as long as it continued before him.

At length the basket was filled; and the young lady entered the saloon. A blush of surprise, at seeing a stranger, where she had expected to find no one, crossed her ingenuous face; but no embarrassment marred the high-bred ease and grace with which she paid him the courtesy of reception in her father's absence.

On the return of the riding party, it was found that on the very day after, don Pedro and his train must bid adieu to Leonato; not, however, without the expression of a hope that when the campaign was over, they should all return to enjoy a renewal of their pleasant visit.

Their departure left quite a void in Leonato's circle. The affability of don Pedro, with the wit and spirit of signor Benedick, were especially missed. The family party were assembled in the saloon the evening after their friends had left them, when they fell into the unconscious silence which betokens an unexpressed regret, felt in common; until Beatrice exclaimed:—

"Come, this is dull work, this sitting doing nothing. Thinking and brooding is worse than nothing, yet the same,—'tis naught."

"What should we do better, coz?" said Hero.

"Talk—talk scandal. Let us amuse ourselves with backbiting our friends, in revenge for turning their backs upon us."

"What scandal wilt thou invent, niece? For sure calumny itself cannot find aught to report amiss of the noble gentlemen who have just left us;" said Leonato. "There is my esteemed

friend, don Pedro; even thy saucy tongue will not dare level slander against a gentleman so complete?"

"He is your dearest friend, uncle mine;" she said; "that should exempt him from censure, even though his own desert did not set slander at defiance. But there is his brother, don John. Can charity itself say a word in his favour, and hope to be thought other than hypocrisy?"

"He was ever an unhappy gentleman;" said Antonio; "his position and his disposition are both unhappy."

"And, certes, he makes those about him unhappy;" said Beatrice. "He is enough to poison bliss itself. If a woman were to meet him in Heaven, she'd pray to be delivered thence."

"You allow there's a likelihood of his going thither?" said her uncle Leonato, smiling; "there's a chance yet for my friend's poor brother."

"He is indeed a poor soul! yet he hath the pride of the prince of fallen angels,—Lucifer himself."

"Do you think he's proud?" asked Leonato.

"'Proud?' He's too proud to say his prayers;" she answered.

"How like you count Claudio, the young soldier, my friend Gregorio's nephew?" asked Antonio.

"I saw him but yesterday for the first time;" she replied; "'tis hard to judge a man by a few hours' knowledge, when whole years scarce suffice a woman to get all her husband's foibles by heart; but a soldier's character is seldom so deep but it may be seen through, as you look into a stream,—down to the very bottom at once."

"Pure, and transparent;" said Hero.

"Cry you mercy, sweet coz!" said Beatrice. "What say you to shallow, and nothing but gay babble?"

"Claudio hath more in him than belongs to a mere soldier," said Leonato; "he is a young gentleman of good discretion, good breeding, and good birth."

"With a good pair of eyes, uncle, a good leg, a good hand, and an excellent good opinion of himself altogether;" said Beatrice.

"Nay, you cannot call him vain, cousin;" said Hero; "he hath a tongue as ready in others' praise as it is mute upon his own."

"You have haply given more time to the study of this new tongue than I, coz;" returned Beatrice. "I learned scarce anything of it; you seem well versed in its subtleties. I give you joy of your proficiency, sweet Hero."

"You have not told us what you think of signor Benedick, of Padua, niece;" said Leonato.

"I think nothing of him, uncle. Which may mean that I take him to be worthy of no thought; or that I think him of no worth. The truth is, he hath sunk himself to a cipher in my opinion, since I have found the poor opinion he hath of women."

"I know signor Benedick stands at low rate with cousin Beatrice;" said Gaetano; "for she treats him even more roughly than she does me. She uses little ceremony with us, but still less with him. But I can't wonder at it; for the gentleman is scarce civil to her. He seizes all occasions to taunt and retort upon her for her just treatment of him; calling her my lady Disdain, and other fine witty names, that I can't see the humour of, for the life of me. If she disdain him, very right; if she scoff at him, so much the better."

"But what is this poor opinion he entertains of women, niece?" said Leonato.

"Marry, uncle, this; he professes to believe that none look on him but love him."

"He should at least be grateful for their weakness, and hold his tongue about it;" said her uncle, laughing.

"So far from gratitude, he professes, that, for his part, he can love none in return. 'Bella donna' is the deadliest of all poisons to him. He desires to keep his heart unscorched; whereby he thinks he proveth he hath more sense in one of his little toes than Leander in all his big head,—who, they say, poor youth, was troubled with water on his brain, besides fire in his heart."

"You will allow that signor Benedick hath wit, niece? No one can deny him to have wit;" said Leonato.

"Truly, uncle, if Nature hath gifted him with any, 'tis the

more shame of him to mislay it as he does. 'Tis ever new moon with him; the best part of his wits are gone wandering; and where he should seek them is in darkness."

"Nay, niece, this is sheer malice. Benedick's wit is ever forcible, lively, and present to the occasion."

"Right, uncle, 'tis so ever present, we would fain have the relief of its absence. We rejoice in its absence,—as we are doing now."

But the campaign lasted long; the wars were protracted; and it was more than a twelvemonth ere don Pedro was at liberty to fulfil his promise of returning to Messina. At the end of that period, however, a messenger arrived from his highness, announcing his approach forthwith. Leonato and his family welcomed the tidings with joy; and questioned the bearer eagerly respecting their friends. Beatrice perplexed the man by asking after her old wit-adversary thus:—"*I pray you, is signor Montanto returned from the wars, or no?*"

When Hero rejoined:—"*My cousin means signor Benedick, of Padua.*"

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING, Act i. Sc. 1.

TALE XII.

OLIVIA; THE LADY OF ILLYRIA.

WITHIN a handsome house in Illyria sat a family party. It consisted of a gentleman, who sat in an arm-chair, with one elbow leaning on the table near him, reading to a lady seated near him, occupied with some kind of light needle-work. Near to them stood a cradle; in it lay a heap of snowy clothing, from the midst of which peered a rosy little face, with blue eyes that stared and blinked alternately, as if they were wondering what could be the meaning of the humming monotony of the reading aloud. Close beside the cradle sat a little girl, who was employed in rocking her baby brother, watching his staring eyes, and amusing herself with the grave interest they seemed to be taking in the subject of the book. There was a loud ring at the entrance-bell.

"My brother Toby lets us know of his arrival this evening, with yet more than his usual energy;" said the lady. "I could wish he would not ring with so imperative a hand. It almost sounds like the hasty announcement of some fearful accident."

"Fear nothing, my love; 'tis no more than Toby's eagerness to apprize us of his coming—which he knows always enlivens and pleasures us."

But the first sight of his brother-in-law's face, as he entered the room, showed the gentleman that something had indeed happened more than usual.

In lieu of the hearty, somewhat boisterous way in which the new-comer made his nightly entrance among them; he came in hurriedly, with pale cheeks, and with an expression in his eyes,

that spoke plainly their having just come from beholding a sight of horror. In his arms he held an infant covered with blood. He hastily told his story. How he was coming as usual, to spend the evening with his sister and her husband, when he had stumbled over the body of a man, that lay right in his path, pierced through with wounds. How he had discovered that he was quite dead; that his pockets had been rifled; all his money and papers gone. How, upon the dead man's bosom lay the sleeping babe, steeped in its father's blood. How he had raised it in his arms, and brought it home to his sister. He ended by saying that he had taken leave to send some of his good brother's servants to fetch the body of the poor gentleman out of the road.'

The child had awakened; and was leaping and bounding in his arms towards the shining candle, and crowing with delight at the brilliant object.

The eyes of the good-natured sir Toby were moist, as he watched the rapture of the little one, and thought of how he had found it. While both his brother and sister partook of his emotion to see the little creature with its starry eyes, and glee-full crow, and frock bedabbled with the heart-blood of him who gave it life.

"You will let it be our child, my husband; it shall abide with us, shall it not, and be no less our care than our own two?" whispered the lady.

"Surely;" replied he. "What says my little Olivia, will she have a baby-sister as well as a baby-brother?"

But before she could reply, the small individual in the cradle began to cry lustily. This created an instant diversion in his favour. For some time every effort to soothe the small gentleman's indignation was unavailing. At length his sister hit upon the happy expedient of showing him the new baby. In an instant, the sight of the bright little thing took his attention, he held out his arms towards it, and struggled to get at it.

As they stood watching the pretty sight the lady said softly:—"Poor little creature! I wonder what her name is! Were there no traces, brother?—no pocket-book—no mark by which you could guess who or what the unhappy traveller was?"

"None; but he had the unmistakable look of a gentleman;" replied sir Toby. "No matter however. Since you and my good brother consent to adopt the little one, give her a name of your own choosing.

"Since she was found by the light of the stars—or rather of one star; for no other than the evening planet is in the sky; what say you to calling her Astrella?" returned the babe's new father.

And thus it was settled.

They were still, all three, mere children, when Astrella was attacked by a violent fever. The countess had left the sick-room to hear the opinion of the physician, without perceiving that her little son Cynthio had crept into the room. But on re-entering the sick-room, what was this tender mother's dismay at seeing her young son stretched upon the bed by the side of Astrella, sobbing as if his little heart would break.

"Oh she is very ill, mamma! Very ill!" he faltered. "So I determined I would come and be ill here too." And the little fellow again flung himself down, his cheek close against hers.

"The mischief is incurred, alas!" murmured the mother. "Heaven avert its worst consequence!"

And soon she beheld her young boy languish and fall ill of the same raging fever that burned in the veins of Astrella.

But her son was spared to her. Both he and Astrella struggled through their peril, and survived.

The fever left them weak, and singularly altered in person. Astrella had shot up into a tall thin girl, while the boy Cynthio seemed to have shrunk into the dimensions of a baby; and he had so little strength left, that he could only move about wheeled in a garden-chair.

Change of air,—especially sea air—being recommended, the count removed his family to one of his tenant's houses that was situated down on the very beach.

Here the children had two new play-fellows about their own age. One was daughter to the count's tenant. She had a comely face, a smart person, high spirits, and a paramount turn

for waggery and drollery. Her name was Maria. The other was the orphan son of a poor fisherman, drowned on that coast. He was reputed an oddity; but his light-hearted frolic, fun, and inexhaustible good-temper, made him a great favourite. There was not a cottage round about but gladly afforded a meal or a shelter to whimsical Feste, as they called him.

The sojourn at the sea-side had produced its hoped-for effect. But though Cynthio recovered the use of his limbs, yet his growth was irretrievably stinted. He remained a very little fellow; and seemed a mere child, for some years to come. On the contrary, Astrella's sudden increase of stature after the fever, went on.

Cynthio's devotion to her continued the same. He was so attentive to her, so careful of her, that it became matter of remark; he was called Astrella's 'little husband.'

He took much pride in the title; and spoke of her as 'my wife,' with great complacency, which evidently delighted himself, while it amusingly contrasted with his childish looks and slight proportions.

Soon after their re-establishment at Casa Benucci, sir Toby returned from Venice. He brought with him a young Frenchman, whose lively manners and companionable qualities soon won him the favour of the count; but there was something about this stranger that made the countess find it impossible to like him. But, with this exception, the chevalier Dorfaux managed to ingratiate himself into general favour.

When the chevalier Dorfaux's visit at Casa Benucci came to a close, sir Toby went with him; as it had been agreed, that the two gentlemen would take a trip together to Naples, during the carnival season.

Her brother had not long left them, when the countess Benucci was attacked by a mortal illness, which terminated her existence suddenly.

The count thought it best to travel for a time; that change of scene might work its good effect upon the young people and himself. He therefore took them a tour into Greece, which occupied a considerable period, with profit to both

mind and body, restoring them to Casa Benucci in recovered peace.

The count was well pleased to see the grace and discretion with which his young daughter filled the post of mistress, in presiding over his household. He sent for his tenant's daughter, Maria, and placed her as waiting-maid about the person of the young countess, knowing Olivia's liking for her; and thinking that her sprightly disposition would make her a desirable companion. Maria was the very briskest and smallest of creatures; she was like a fairy in her proportions; neat and trim in her dress as a doll; light and quick in her motions as a bird,—nay, as a bat,—but then a bat has an ugly face. Now hers was a nice little round face, with pippin cheeks, and cherry lips, and bright beady eyes. They looked as sharp and as piercing as needle-points,—darting mischief through their keen glances; merry, waggish, roguish eyes. You could not think of their prettiness for their mischievousness; and could hardly trouble yourself about their mischievousness, for their good temper; and certainly, whatever you might think about when you looked at them, you couldn't keep yours off them, such bewitching little wicked eyes they were. She flitted about the house like an elf or a sprite; so light of foot, so airy, so quickly appearing, so swiftly vanishing was she. You caught sight of her whisking skirts like a butterfly's wing; they had fluttered away before she could settle—what she had come for; or you, that you had actually seen her. She darted into your ken like a falling-star, and disappeared as abruptly. She could neither move, look, nor speak, but rapidly. She was a midge, an atomy,—anything that is lightest, brightest, and smallest. The lad, Feste, was also added to the household retainers, as a privileged fool, half jester, half minstrel.

Insensibly time crept on. The children had grown up into youth and confirmed beauty, preserving still the same characteristics which had from the first distinguished them. Sir Toby found them all wonderfully grown, when he came back at length to Illyria.

"You will find Cynthio and the two girls good, dutiful

children, still, though grown into young men and women," said the count; "and as well-inclined for a frolic with cousin Toby as ever."

"'Tis a good hearing; for is not mirth the spirit of existence, and jollity the wine of life? Without mirth and jollity, man is little better than a drained flask, a stale anchovy, a musty melon; a dry, empty husk,—fruitless, worthless, to himself or others."

"Thy metaphors, brother, remind me that we have offered thee no refreshment yet;" said the count. "After your warm walk, a cool flask of Cypro will not be amiss. Olivia, bid them bring fruit and wine out here in the garden; let it be placed beneath the shade of this spreading chestnut."

Olivia despatched her gentlewoman with the requisite orders; and her uncle had fresh occasion to laud her grace and housewifely accomplishment.

"By my troth, they shall be my three mirabilaries;" said he, looking upon her, Cynthio, and Astrella. "I will quote them as wonders of creation, and vaunt them to be no less than perfections of nature."

"You will risk spoiling your wonders, cousin; and then they will be no longer perfection;" said Olivia. "That methinks, were scarcely the deed of a good or wise kinsman."

"To be wise and good, asks more prudence than dwells in frail humanity, when there are such things to praise and enjoy as those now before me;" said sir Toby, helping himself to some of the fruit and iced wine; "Casa Benucci overflows with excellence; from its inmates to its good cheer; fairest creatures, and choicest fare; what would a man have more to make him the reverse of prudent?"

"Is not prudence just the requisite quintessential drop that gives the highest flavour to all the rest,—the truest relish to their enjoyment?" asked the count.

"Truly, I know not but you sober fellows may have the advantage in the long run over us roysterers;" said sir Toby; "but while we are running, we think wholly of the sport, nothing of its consequences. But what a keen eye to consequence have you shown, brother, in your choice of the people you have gathered about you, since last I was here. For signor

Malvolio,—who is a treasure of consequentiality in himself,—you had him for a steward ere I left; but there is that lad, Fabian, who carried hither the wine; he hath a fund of intelligence in his face, that promises well for a helping hand at a joke, or a pleasant device; and then there is the other lad,—Feste, I think you called him,—with a trick of eye, and a humorous twist of his lip, that speak a world of lurking jest and good fooling."

"And you shall hear him sing a song presently, brother, that shall make you call him a lark in human shape, so blithe, so airy, so melodious and untiring is his voice;" said the count.

"With all my heart; I love a good song as I love good wine; it sets a man's blood spinning triumphant; and fills me his brain with ecstatic fancies. A man is a god while he listens to music, and quaffs grape-juice."

"Good mistress Maria, bid Feste come hither;" said the count, to his daughter's waiting-maid, who had just brought out a veil for her young lady.

"And then there is that little silver moth of a damsel, whom you have chosen for my niece's gentlewoman;" continued sir Toby; "can anything be better devised, than having such a grig of a girl always in sight. Her very look is enough to banish spleen from a household."

"She is indeed, merry and lightsome as a bird;" said the count.

"A very titmouse,—a golden-crested wren!" said sir Toby.

"And when heard you from your friend, the chevalier Dorfaux?" asked the count.

"Odso, I had forgot! I have a letter here in my pocket from him;" said sir Toby. "It is dated from Paris; but in it he talks of leaving immediately, and travelling fast, so as to meet me on my return hither; he may, therefore, be expected nearly as soon as his epistle."

He had hardly given utterance to the words ere a servant announced the arrival of the chevalier himself.

"We will all go into the house and give him welcome;" said count Benucci.

As Cynthio and Olivia, with Astrella, followed their father and uncle from the garden, the youth said to his sister:—"I had almost forgotten there was such a being in the world. It

seems like a dream, when he paid us a visit before. Do you remember that time, Olivia? Did you remember this French gentleman, Astrella?"

A visible confusion passed over her face.

"I see you do;" he said.

He fell into a deep reverie; from which he was awakened by their reaching the house. He heard the chevalier paying eager greeting to all, and receiving the welcome of the count and sir Toby in return. He looked up to see the young Frenchman bowing upon Astrella's hand, and pouring forth a profusion of compliments upon the heightened charms that time had wrought in both her and Olivia. He advanced mechanically, to offer the usual words of salutation to the newly-arrived guest; when the chevalier exclaimed:—Ah, 'the little husband!' How are you, mon cher?"

At this instant, Cynthio caught sight of the group they presented, in one of the tall mirrors near. He saw the handsome face and figure of the Frenchman; tall, elegant, full of that self-possession and polished air, which knowledge of the world confers. He saw beside it, his own slight, boyish frame, and girlish countenance. He fancied he saw a look of embarrassment cross Astrella's face, as the chevalier, in his cool, easy, French style, uttered the words 'little husband.'

For the first time in his life, Cynthio found himself wishing that they had never been applied to him in connection with Astrella.

He was frightened at the rush of emotion that came upon his heart; he left the saloon, and wandered forth alone into the garden-grounds.

It was just such an evening as the one he had often heard described, when Astrella was first brought home, an orphan babe, to his father's house.

"She has never regarded me in any other light than as a brother, I fancied I thought of her but as a sister, notwithstanding the idle titles they gave us;" he passionately mused; "but what I have learned of my feelings within this last hour, tells me, it is as no sister that I love her. How will she bear to think of me as a lover,—me, a brother, a boy, as she has always

considered me? A poor paltry boy, with a creamy face, a stripling form. If but a boy, a poor silly youth, in appearance, let me be a man in spirit, in heart. My first task shall be to teach myself control: that I may not shock her by a premature betrayal of any other feeling than the affectionate brotherly love to which she has been accustomed. Whatever befall, she shall see none of this boyish weakness. If her little husband cannot gain her affections, he will at least preserve her esteem."

At breakfast next morning, Cynthio began his self-imposed task of keeping strict guard on his every look and word; he exerted himself to chat with his father, and the chevalier, and joined heartily in a plan for an excursion to a neighbouring spot, celebrated for its fine view. The gay manner in which he rattled on, passed completely with all the rest; but Olivia thought she could perceive that her young brother's spirits were forced.

It was agreed to make the excursion a riding-party.

The count placed his daughter on horse-back himself; and Cynthio was preparing, as usual, to offer his assistance to Astrella in mounting, when the chevalier advanced, in his peremptory style of officious deference, and lifted her into the saddle.

During the ride, Astrella's horse had shown symptoms of uneasiness. It was a skittish, spirited creature; and Cynthio had always objected to Astrella's trusting herself on its back; but she was a fearless rider, and she would hear nothing in disparagement of Bayardo's good qualities. But now, the heat, and the gnats, together, tormented Bayardo beyond his patience. He pranced, and curvetted about, and at length began rearing. Cynthio rode close in upon the snorting beast, seized the bridle, and effectually checked him.

"Well done, 'petit palfrenier!' Bravissimo!" exclaimed the chevalier, approaching, when the steed was quieted; for, during the worst, he had kept at a respectful distance. They rode on for some time after this, quietly enough. But at a turn of the road Bayardo suddenly darted away at full gallop.

The chevalier was mounted on a noble animal, one of the finest in the count's stud. It instantly set off after Astrella's runaway horse.

"Stop, stop, chevalier! Your pursuit will but endanger her!" shouted the count. But it was in vain. The Frenchman's skill sufficed not to rein in a horse bent upon a chase.

"He does not know, father; he thinks to rescue her!" said Olivia; (Cynthio could not speak.) "Heaven grant, his rashness may answer better than our caution."

And the three went on as quietly as their impatient fears would let them.

Meantime, the two runaway horses had shot far out of sight. On, and on, they went. The breathless rapidity of the pace she was going, the terror, the imminence of the peril, at length caused Astrella to swoon. Then she was thrown. But she fortunately alighted on a turf-bank, which broke the violence of the fall.

The chevalier's horse had stopped of his own accord, not far from the spot. The suddenness of the check had like to have pitched the rider over, head foremost. But he recovered himself, dismounted, and went towards Astrella, who still lay senseless.

She revived, to find the chevalier Dorfaux bending over her, and whispering softest inquiries.

"You have saved my life, sir;" she said. "How can I be sufficiently grateful for your intrepidity? I owe you my life."

The Frenchman made no denial. "You can more than reward any help I may have been so fortunate as to afford, sweet Astrella. It is my life that is in your hands. Make it henceforth a happy one, by telling me I may win your love.

Astrella did not reply; she looked round, as if for her accustomed friends.

"You do not answer me, lovely Astrella; look upon me,—say you do not hate me,—say,——"

"Hate you! How can I hate one who has been so generously good to me?—one who has just risked his life to save mine?" said the young girl, ingenuously.

"Say then that you will take pity on me, that you will love me, that you will let me prove my love for you;" and the Frenchman pressed her in his arms.

Astrella withdrew from his embrace, saying :—"But where are Cynthio and Olivia? Where is the count? They will be very uneasy."

She had hardly finished speaking, ere they all three came in sight.

"She is safe, then! How can we thank you enough, chevalier, for your care of our dear one?" said the count, grasping the chevalier's hand, while Olivia and Cynthio threw themselves off their horses, and hastened to Astrella.

"She shall ride home on my pony, she shall not mount the vicious beast again!" exclaimed Cynthio; "old Nerino is quiet as a cardinal's pad-nag."

This incident made the chevalier a greater general favourite at Casa Benucci than ever. Once, indeed, Feste, the clown, whispered in the ear of Maria a scoff at his title of chevalier; declaring that for his own part, he believed it was through industrial qualifications alone, that Dorfaux could lay claim to it.

"'Industrial!' He's said to be a man of birth and honour;" answered Maria; "such people are above being industrious, thou know'st. Their spirit won't let 'em earn their own bread. They'd rather beg it; or eat it out of other people's industry."

"You don't take me, good mistress Mary;" he replied. "Be it known unto you, that there is a certain order of chivalry in his country, that live by their brains, and such odd quirks of contrivance as the brain deviseth; knights of the fertile invention, that by the aid of quick wits, and it may be, of nimble fingers, do manage to pick up a living out of the follies and foibles of their fellow-men; and these knights, being notable workmen, ever busy in operation, passing active in practising their art, have been distinguished by the appellation—'chevaliers of the order of industry.' Their badge is a swan; which beareth a fair white body on the surface, and plies black legs beneath."

"Pick-pockets, pick-purses, highwaymen, and thieves, are the brothers of such an order of chivalry as thou describest; and none other than god Mercury their Grand-master;" answered she.

"Thou choosest ill-favoured names, mistress Mary;" replied the clown. "But the gentry I mean might come under the category of polite pick-pockets,—robbers on the highway of saloons and drawing-rooms."

"And such a one thou thinkest this chevalier Dorfaux?" said she.

"Think what I may, I say nothing. 'Tis seldom safe to say half we think; and nothing is less than half;" he concluded, turning on his heel.

And so, this shrewd surmise of Feste's passed off but as one of the fool's jests.

Meantime, the chevalier's insinuating address, and persevering court were winning their way with Astrella. Above all, the claim she conceived him to have upon her gratitude, in saving her life, inclined her to return his ardently-expressed passion. Unpractised in the ways of the world, she had followed his insidious wish of keeping the avowal of his feelings a secret. On a certain morning, she sat at one of the windows in the room where the family usually passed the forenoon, occupied in drawing a group of flowers, for the count's approaching birthday. The chevalier was hovering near the table, under the pretence of making a sketch of the view of the grounds from the window.

Cynthio held a book in his hand, and sat appearing to read, in the next window-seat. Olivia was turning over the leaves of some lute-music, and trying a piece or two, that she intended to sing with her brother and Astrella on the coming occasion.

Under cover of the low-struck chords, and half-hummed singing, the chevalier was pursuing a murmured conversation with Astrella, as she bent over her drawing.

Presently Olivia left the room, to join the count in the garden.

"Give me at least the rose;" said the chevalier.

Cynthio heard no answer; but as he raised his eyes from the page before him, he saw the bright blush that accompanied her silent denial.

"The rose,—the rose, is the one I would have;" he urged.

Yet another moment she hesitated; then she raised her hand, as if about to draw it from among the others; but in the act, her eyes met those of Cynthio.

"The chevalier Dorfaux shows less taste than usual, Cynthio;" she said, attempting to cover her conscious confusion by a gay manner; "he would fain persuade me that these half-withered flowers are better than fresh ones."

"They have acquired a value from having formed a study for my father's gift;" said Cynthio, anxious to relieve her embarrassment. "Come, you shall distribute them; give me one."

"And welcome;" she said, in her frank cordial manner; "choose which it shall be."

"Not the rose! I have claimed that!" said the chevalier.

"I will be contented with this little star-flower;" Cynthio said; "its simple, innocent beauty is all I could wish."

"That! What an ignorant botanist you are, Cynthio mio;" said Astrella; "that is a humble little hedge-side blossom,—a weed. I think they call it a 'stellaria.' It was Olivia who would have me put it into the group for the count's birthday drawing; she said the little starry thing would remind him of his Astrella. Choose some other; that's a poor weed. 'Tis not worth your having."

"Nay, if you give me any, give me the stellaria;" said Cynthio.

"If you've taken a fancy to it, you shall have it;" she said, drawing the stem of the delicate white blossom out of the water; "let me put it in the button-hole of your vest, for you; since you pay the meek little wretch the honour of choosing it, its glory shall be proclaimed to the world."

And she stuck the flower in his bosom with the playful freedom of a child.

"She loves him! I can no longer doubt; she loves him!" was the thought that smote upon Cynthio's heart, as the chevalier led Astrella away, beseeching her to indulge him with a walk through the flower-garden; under pretext of comparing the rose he had preferred, with those growing there. "She loves him! she loves him! Oh, Astrella! my own Astrella!"

His eyes fell upon the stellaria. Its sight had well-nigh wrung from him those tears which he had so lately repressed. It was one of those moments when the soul attains the growth

of years in a single point of time. Cynthio's spirit had learnt its own powers of fortitude, and however boyish his person might remain, he had acquired a sense of internal mastery which rendered him thenceforth a man.

When Olivia joined the count in the box-tree bower, she merely peeped in, saw he was there, and crept quietly to a seat by his side; while he, looking up, welcomed her with a smiling holding out of his hand, and went on reading. The father and daughter sat thus for some time; the stillness of the spot and of their employment, harmonizing with the quiet understanding between them, and producing that exquisite contentment which is almost more perfect than joy.

Presently, upon the silence, there came the sound of low-murmured conversation.

The speakers were in a green alley, carpeted with turf, that led immediately at the back of the box-tree bower,—and as they came nearer, what they said could be distinguished. There was something equivocal in the import of the pleading speeches that seemed to strike upon the count's ear. He listened; changed colour; then started up, exclaiming:—"He would not dare be guilty of such baseness, such perfidy! He dare not mean such villany!"

Then he stepped forward, made himself a way through the branches of the box-tree, and stood in the green alley, confronting Dorfaux and Astrella.

For a moment the count gazed earnestly upon the latter,—without anger,—but keenly, as if he would read her heart. Then he turned to the Frenchman, and said, with a stern calmness:—"You love this young creature? You love her truly—honourably? Your intentions are honourable? I cannot, will not doubt it."

"I am a younger brother, my lord, with but a younger brother's portion to support a wife; how can I hope to marry—how dare I offer marriage——" stammered the chevalier.

"Yet you dared to offer love, sir;" said the count. "You dared seek to entangle the affections of an artless, innocent girl. But if, as I fear, they are indeed won," he added, again glancing

at the trembling Astrella, "your plea of scanty fortune shall be no bar. She is my adopted daughter. She shall have no less a dower than I destine for Olivia. If your views, therefore, are what I will not doubt them to be——"

"What can they be but marriage—marriage with one I love even to the forgetfulness of aught save my rash passion?" interrupted Dorfaux. "It urged me to forget the strange appearance my secret suit might bear; it led me to forget what was due to my Astrella's protector, her adopted father."

"Come hither, my dear child;" said the count to Astrella. He took her tenderly in his arms, and said:—"Do you love this gentleman? Can you accept him for your husband?"

"He saved my life—he loves me;" whispered Astrella, as she hid her glowing face upon the count's bosom.

He half sighed; but he kissed her cheek encouragingly. Then he put her hand in Dorfaux's, saying:—"You will understand me, when I tell you, sir, that for the sake of this gentle heart, I accept your own construction of the words I overheard you speak to her."

The chevalier replied by a profusion of acknowledgments, and grateful protestation. The count's generous, open disposition, was not proof against such an appearance of good-hearted frankness. He believed the young Frenchman, and restored him to his full confidence again. They returned with Olivia, to the house; the count playfully talking over his project for settling the young couple in a charming cottage he had on the borders of his estate, so that Astrella should be always near her old friends. He was still chatting on, upon this topic, when they entered the sitting-room.

"Cynthio moping here by himself, upon one of the couches, when there is so much lively matter toward!" exclaimed the count. "What think ye of a wedding?"

"You forget, my lord, that the little husband may not be so delighted to hear that his wife is to be taken from him;" said the chevalier, laughing.

"Pooh! It's high time that foolish name should be given up;" said the count. "It was all very well when they were babies together. Cynthio is a tall lad now; and boys are apt to

be so absurd as to feel ashamed of a title like that. You needn't look disconcerted about such a trifle. Why, you bite your lip, and turn as white as though you were really angry. Come come;" continued his father; "we all know you love Astrella as a good brother should; she is no less dear to us all, than if she were in truth our own flesh and blood. This very evening we will all go in a body and look at the pretty place of which she is soon to be mistress. You know the cottage I mean? With the olive-ground and vineyard, and the peep of the sea from the upper windows?" And thus the count chatted on in the gaiety of his heart.

All was active preparation and bustle in Casa Benucci for the approaching wedding; and amidst the general pre-occupation, Cynthio's misery passed unnoticed.

The ceremony in the chantry was performed; the banquet in the grand saloon was concluded when the count and his family assembled to bid the young couple farewell; it having been agreed that they should at once occupy their new home—the cottage-farm.

"Dear Olivia—my more than sister—revered father—kind uncle—beloved brother—" faltered Astrella, as she gave her hand to each in turn, "you know my heart, dear friends, you know it is not ungrateful, though unable to express its recognition of all your loving care."

Sir Toby had hugged her against his broad burly chest, with something that sounded very like a sob trying to smother itself up in a chuckling laugh; but not succeeding altogether to his mind in his effort at mirth, he had playfully pushed her away, declaring that she should not choke up his throat, and prevent his draining the dozen bumpers he meant to quaff to the health of the bride and bridegroom after they were gone.

Astrella turned from the good-humoured knight to Cynthio, who stood next to him.

"Cynthio, dearest friend, kindest brother—" she said, "forgive me if I have ever encroached on your unwearied tolerance of all my whims of babyhood, childhood, and girlhood. Pardon your old playmate's caprices, and think only of your own indulgence towards herself."

Cynthio, in a blissful dream of one moment, held her in his arms, where she had thrown herself with all the frank freedom of her innocent loving heart.

From the mingled ecstasy and agony of such a moment, Cynthio was recalled by hearing the chevalier's voice, saying in its tone of paraded gaiety :—"The real husband may now assert his privilege, in preference to the little husband. Come, Astrella. See, they are all tarrying to escort us as far as the garden-gate."

Cynthio, as still in a trance, saw the chevalier lead Astrella away; he unconsciously clutched at something near him for support, which he fancied was the cushioned back of a couch by which he stood; he watched the gradual disappearance of the crowd, then he staggered blindly forwards, as if with some indefinite idea of following, in the hope to gain yet one more parting glimpse of her.

By his side had stood Olivia. She it was who, in happening to lean on the back of the couch, had received the vehement imprint of Cynthio's grasp upon her arm. She read his secret. She saw that the young boy, the stripling lad, cherished a passion strong as ever mastered man. She saw that it was with no brother's affection that Cynthio loved Astrella.

That night Olivia crept gently to her brother's sleeping-room; Cynthio had flung himself on his bed in despair; his sister stole close to him and knelt beside him. She raised the head that was buried in the folded arms, and bent her own face against his, until their cheeks touched.

"Olivia! My sister!" exclaimed Cynthio; as his head drooped upon Olivia's bosom. She gathered him in her arms, gently and lovingly as a young mother might have done; his fair face, and slender figure, making him look still quite a boy, and much her junior.

"You guess my secret?" he at length said, in a broken tone, just venturing to glance at her countenance, while he kept his own averted.

"I do."

Cynthio flung his arms about his sister's neck, drew her face towards him; kissed her on the mouth and eyelids; and then sank back exhausted.

In an hour after, Olivia crept to his room, and found him in a profound slumber.

With ceaseless vigilance, Olivia dedicated herself to the care of her young brother. She guarded his secret from suspicion, she protected him from remark, as from all that could surprise him into self-betrayal, or add poignancy to his regrets.

One of the earliest occasions Olivia had for the exercise of her sisterly thought, was when Maria flew into the room where Cynthio and she were sitting together quietly, to announce the first visit of the new-married pair.

"She's come, she's come! The bride is here! The bride and her husband! I should say the chevalier and madame Dorfaux. How strange the new name sounds! Our young lady Astrella—madame Dorfaux!"

Knowing how the new name, thus abruptly spoken, must smite upon his heart, Olivia made the most of her own startled hearing of the sound.

"And is it in this wild fashion thou bring'st me the tidings?" she said; "but, in sooth, a wedding is apt to turn the soberest of damsels' wits; and thou, Gill-o'-the-wisp as thou art, must e'en be forgiven for startling me thus. Come, lead me where she is." And Olivia, anxious to afford a moment to her brother for the recovery of his composure, hastily followed the steps of Maria, who had darted out again.

He was prepared when they all entered, and was outwardly calm.

The intimacy between sir Toby and the chevalier Dorfaux, was maintained now with greater zest than ever. Astrella's dowry formed an agreeable supply to her husband, at the very time when his previous resources had dwindled to a mere nothing. It principally found its way to the gaming-table; but there were other resorts of so-called pleasure, where this sum quickly melted.

After some months, scandal began to be busy about him; his credit waned; while the gentlemen towards whom he had contracted debts of honour, became rather more than politely pressing.

Rumours of these things at length reached Casa Benucci;

and the count was communing with himself on this theme, when Fabian came to announce the chevalier and madame Dorfaux.

"I came to ask you, my dear count," Dorfaux said, "to let us all ride over this morning to see some archery, which I hear is to take place in some grounds about five miles off; there is to be a high prize given; there will be some good betting; it will be excellent sport; the ladies will enjoy it, and——"

"You would not surely venture on horseback, Astrella?" said Olivia, putting into words of her own, the anxious thought she knew was in Cynthio's heart.

Astrella looked timidly at her husband.

"Pooh, pooh! 'twill do her good! Nothing like a good scampering gallop for health. You will go, ma chère amie;" said the chevalier.

"Certainly;" she said gently. Astrella's gentle voice had, for many weeks past, become more than gentle,—it was subdued, in its tone of mild resignation.

"The count said quietly, in reply to the young wife's last complying word:—"My dear child, I will not have it so; your husband must allow me the licence of an old married man and your adopted father, to forbid your mounting on horseback. I do not think it would be prudent for you to ride; and moreover, the chevalier will excuse me if I add, that I do not approve of amusements where betting, and high stakes form the chief attraction."

"But I assure you, the archery itself is expected to be very fine; that in itself will be excitement sufficient;" said Dorfaux, with his usual glib decision. "I would not lose the sight for the universe; so, if your paternal care of Astrella will not let you think it safe for her to go, I beg you will have the kindness to lend me a horse for the occasion. It is too far to walk; and as a poor country gentleman like myself cannot afford to keep a nag, I must e'en be beholden to my friend."

"I am glad to learn the chevalier Dorfaux is guided by prudential considerations, even in so far as the keeping of a riding-horse is concerned;" said the count. "Rumour gives him not credit for so strict an economy."

"Oh, I assure you, my dear sir, I am the most economical of men;" said the airy Frenchman. "Were it not for the sake of my wife—your all-charming Astrella—I could be content to live upon a crust;" added he, helping himself plentifully to some of the iced wine and other refreshments that the count's attendants brought in at this juncture.

"It is the part of a fool to make wise observations," said Feste, the clown, who was pouring out a goblet of water mingled with Aleatico, for his master; "and I've observed that those people who say, 'I can do with a crust,' never find a crust do for them."

"It is the part of a fool, if he be wise, to keep his sapient remarks to himself, until they be called for;" said the chevalier, with more petulance than his usual craft of careless gaiety allowed itself.

"That remark of yours, shows you know nothing of a fool's duty, sir chevalier;" replied Feste; "a fool should make all his remarks aloud, that his hearers may benefit: the vicious, by the wisdom contained therein, the innocent, by the wit. And as for awaiting solicitation, 'tis the essence of his vocation that his sallies be ever ready, and forthcoming, undemanded."

"Nay, it may be so, good fellow; I pretend to know nothing of the merits of a fool;" said the chevalier; "I should be wanting in modesty, were I to say other than that there is little of the fool in me."

"More knave, than fool, perhaps?" asked Feste, slily.

"You exceed your licence, sirrah;" said the count; "because your over-boldness is tolerated by ourselves, in allowance for your jester's privilege, I cannot have you take liberties with our guests."

"Where there is no truth in the sarcasm, there is no offence in the jest, my lord;" said the clown. "Conscious of integrity, the chevalier can surely hear the word knavery without wincing. Even though he be taxed with it, the idle word can no more cleave to him, than breath to a mirror. His unsullied conscience doubtless, like the crystal, only shines the purer and brighter for the passing attempt to mistify it."

"A truce with thy mistifications for the present;" said the

count; "bid thy fellows remove these things, when the ladies shall have had what fruit they please; and meantime, the chevalier will do me the favour to accompany me to my study, where I have a word for his private ear."

In the interview that ensued, the count spoke to the young man with the explicitness warranted by his age and character. He told the chevalier the reports that had reached Casa Benucci, of his reckless expenses, his extravagance, his debts. The count ended by presenting him with a sum, which he said he hoped would free him from present embarrassments, as an earnest of his own confidence that he would be more prudent in future.

The chevalier was boundless in professions of good intention, and profuse in promises to reform; and the good count gave credit to assurances that he wished to believe true.

The birth of Astrella's child was a joyful circumstance to those who loved her. Upon this little creature, its beauties, its gifts, its perfections, they all could descant to their hearts' content. To Cynthio, above all, this babe was a delight, a treasure, upon which he could lavish all the secret store of love he had cherished for its mother. He had his Astrella once again! His little Astrella! His darling Astrella! His own Astrella! His father would laughingly joke him for his unmasculine fancy for nursing a baby; but Cynthio was too content in his new-found delight, to be laughed out of his enjoyment.

Olivia inwardly blessed Heaven, that had vouchsafed this requital of her brother's past unhappiness; and Astrella herself, in her affectionate regard for Cynthio, saw with delight the joy he took in her little one.

She was sitting leaning over the back of a low couch, upon which Cynthio lay playing with her child one morning. She watched them romping and frolicking together, and saw the gentle way in which he lent himself to the humours of the little creature, now submitting to be crawled over, and tumbled over, and pulled over; now abandoning his hair to the most ruthless of tugs, now smoothing and caressing the fair locks (that light golden brown he loved so well) of the little tugger's own head in turn.

"Little rogue!" she said; "thou supplant'st thy mother in the indulgent love which was once hers."

"It is the same;" said Cynthio in a low voice.

The child had found out a new object of attraction; it was now plucking at a dark slender chain, espied among the folds of Cynthio's vest.

"Be good, little encroacher;" said the mother, gently trying to disengage the coil in which her babe's fingers had entwined themselves. "Let go, let go, naughty one!"

"Gently, gently, little one;" said Olivia, leaning forward to help extricate the chain from its grasp; "since the toy is woven of my hair, Cynthio would not care to have it broken. Gently, gently! let go, Astrellina-Strellinetta!"

But it was too late to prevent what Olivia foresaw. The child's pertinacity had succeeded in twitching forth the chain; and at the end, hung a small crystal case. The clearness, the dangling motion of the trinket, combined to delight the babe, and nothing could persuade it into relinquishment.

They could have laughed to see the baby wilfulness; had they not all three been possessed by secret thoughts that made their smiles but constrained. Olivia's was for her brother. She instinctively felt the charm which the contents of that locket possessed for him,—though she knew not absolutely what those contents were,—and she trembled to think what Cynthio now felt, to see them hanging in the babe's grasp, close in the eyes of its mother. But Olivia need not have feared. The little star-flower treasured within the crystal, though clearly visible through the transparent enclosure, was no longer recognizable. To his eyes the fair white petals, the slender green stem, were still there in all their delicate beauty; to his eyes, the form of her who gave it, her look as she placed it in his vest, were there enshrined and apparent; but to all eyes else, a few faded shreds were alone perceptible.

The babe had at length given up its plaything, and had fallen into a quiet sleep in Cynthio's arms, when the chevalier suddenly entered.

"Desolate to break up so charming a society!" he exclaimed, bowing round; "but I am compelled to request my wife's

return to the cottage-farm immediately; I have business to transact there, that cannot be effected without her presence. Desolate, I assure you! But it must be."

Astrella arose to obey her husband.

"My father has taken the coach this morning, to pay a long-deferred visit to an old friend," said Olivia; "is it indispensable that you must return home immediately, sir?"

"Indispensable! absolutely indispensable, parole d'honneur!" he replied, laying his hand on his breast, and bowing again.

"We will walk with you across the park-grounds, Astrella;" said Olivia; "you must not carry your baby so far."

"Do you think I should have permitted my cara sposa to bear the burthen? You do not give due credit to the gallantry of our nation, signora;" said the Frenchman.

Olivia did not say she had so little faith in it, that she knew he would only carry the babe out of sight of the house, and then let his wife bear it the rest of the way; but she said:—"The child is asleep; best not disturb it. Cynthio will carry it. And I shall contend for my turn, when it wakes."

"As you will; I always defer to a lady's proposals," returned the chevalier, with another bow; then turning to his wife, he said:—"Allons, ma chère amie, get ready in less time than the generality of your charming sex take for the adorning of their sweet persons. Come."

The chevalier was evidently in a violent hurry.

When they reached the cottage-farm, Cynthio put the child in its mother's arm; and Olivia, knowing how unwillingly her brother entered that roof, took leave at once. The chevalier made not even the pretence of detaining them; and his wife was too anxious to know the cause of her abrupt recall, not to acquiesce.

She learnt it but too soon. A pressing demand had caused her husband to return and extort all that she had left. It was to sign away these deeds, that he had summoned her; it was to deprive herself and child, of house and home for ever, that he had fetched her to that home. The instant he had obtained what he wanted, he seized the parchment, snatched up his hat, and with a smiling bow, departed.

That night Astrella's second baby was born,—dead.

Not many hours after, the person who had now a right to call the cottage-farm his own, sent men to take possession; but the good peasant woman, who acted as nurse to madame Dorfaux, took upon herself to inform count Benucci how matters were going on.

The count was still absent, but his son and daughter hastened to their Astrella.

They found her sitting up in bed, propped by pillows; with a faint flush on her cheek at the joy of seeing them. In the arms of a young girl, the nurse's daughter, was Astrella's child. It stretched out its little hands, to be taken by Cynthio; but his sister carried it to the window, and soon contrived to engage its attention to herself.

The mother's eyes dwelt with serene delight upon her child in the arms of her gentle friend Olivia. She signed to Cynthio to sit upon the bed's edge beside her, and stretched forth her hand for his.

For some time no sound, save the innocent cooings of the little one, broke the stillness in that hushed chamber.

At length the voice of Astrella made itself heard, nearly extinct; but tranquil.

"Dear friends," she said, "it will be your best solace to know that I am happy. Happy in the knowledge that my little Astrella will have the same guardian care that sheltered her mother. At like infant years, you took me in, a little wandering star. Both bereft of a parent's care; my father perished; hers is dead to her. You will never let her know the lack of a father—I feel you will not."

"You know us too well to doubt it;" said the soft voice of Olivia; while the pressure of Cynthio's hand bore testimony to his confirmation of his sister's words.

"One promise I have to entreat of you;" Astrella went on. "It is this. Should her father's caprice ever claim her as his child, promise me that you will refuse."

"She shall be our child," said Olivia; "my brother and I will never yield her."

"In this thought, I can resign my soul to the bliss of its release."

"You can leave us—leave life without a sigh?" murmured Cynthio in broken tones.

"It is hard to own a heart mistaken, betrayed;" she returned. "The humiliation of being wedded for what you bring, not for what you are! And oh, the misery of living unloved!"

Cynthio started. Then he said in an under-breath, "That misery has not been Astrella's."

"True," she replied, with the look of full, open, loving regard which her face always wore, when she spoke of the affection between them; "I do justice to the love of my friends, but ah," and her face sank to its previous sadness, "the heart will thirst for a paramount love, an exclusive love,—love itself. There will come a day when my Cynthio's young heart will learn this thirst—this imperative demand."

"It has already known it," he said, in the same tone as before.

"Then the crystal I saw—it did contain the secret of your heart,—your love? I thought it, and yet——".

"It contained yourself—my little star—my Astrella!" he faltered.

Her eyes were fixed upon him. They seemed as though they would seek the truth of that wild incredible surmise which now, for the first time, presented itself to her imagination.

Sadly, yet with a rapturous intensity, his eyes were bent on hers, and seemed to follow their process of retracing remote events and objects. He saw the tender memories that glided upon her vision; he saw the moistened eyes with which she recalled certain passages in their past life; he beheld the soft smile which played in them, as she at length murmured, "My little husband!"

"He loved you!" Cynthio exclaimed; and the passionate truth of the words was told upon her lips.

Olivia was at length alarmed by the silence that ensued. Approaching the bed she saw them pale and lifeless. Her young brother was in a deep swoon. He had bravely sustained sorrow; but joy was too mighty for him. For Astrella,

—she had died in the knowledge that she was beloved by this faithful, noble heart; she had resigned life, contented, happy.

Count Benucci warmly seconded his son and daughter in their resolve of adopting Astrella's child; and supported them in their resolution to withstand the claims of its father, should he ever think fit to urge them.

For some time there seemed no chance of this; but after a space, the thought that his little daughter might be made a means of extorting money, induced Dorfaux to threaten the assertion of his legitimate rights. He applied by letter. The count wrote in answer; temperately, but decisively declining to give up Astrella's child.

The chevalier retorted peremptorily, violently. He declared that he should lay his cause before his friend Orsino, the reigning duke of Illyria.

But speciously delivered as was the tale, there was something in the bare facts of the case, that suggested other feelings than the ones sought to be produced.

The duke felt interested in the noble family who had shown this generous sympathy with orphanhood. He secretly resolved he would inquire farther into the matter, and coldly told the chevalier that he would take time personally to consider of it, before he would sanction its consideration by his council.

He called a confidential attendant, named Curio; bade him get horses saddled, and prepare to ride with him a short distance out of town, suddenly, and quite privately. Orsino had informed himself of the whereabouts of Casa Benucci, sufficiently to know that he was approaching its precincts, when, on looking over a park paling, among some trees, he saw, seated beneath their shade, a group,—a family-party, that at once arrested his attention. It consisted of a venerable gentleman, of benign aspect, and distinguished bearing, who occupied an easy chair; near to him sat a youth, with a young child upon his knees, over whom he bent in fondling interest with its half-articulate prattle. Close beside the youth stood a lady, reading a letter. She was young, and very beautiful; there was a mingled dignity and sweetness in her countenance, both majesty and gracious-

ness in her mien. The tidings of the letter seemed pleasant, for a smile sat upon her lips. As she raised her eyes, the smile shone there too, in those large, dark, lustrous orbs of transparent depth.

"And Toby writes cheerfully, and happily, does he?" said the grey-haired gentleman, "when does he talk of coming back to us?"

The young lady did not immediately reply; her eyes had encountered those of the stranger on horseback, who was looking over the fence towards their party. He raised his hat, on perceiving that she had observed him, and rode on to the gates of the mansion; where he caused himself to be announced as duke Orsino, who requested an interview with the count Benucci.

"I have seen the venerable count, if I mistake not, seated with his family in the grounds;" said the duke. "Stay, I will not give his lordship the pains of coming to the house to receive me. I will seek him there myself."

The count's seneschal, Malvolio, ushered his grace with much ceremonial, to the spot where they sat.

Duke Orsino, with his native urbanity, introduced himself to the count, and bent courteously to Cynthio and Olivia; then taking a hand of the child's into his own, led to the inquiries he wished to make, regarding her story.

The little one shrank from the strange gentleman, clinging to the bosom of her friend Cynthio; and the duke, smiling, remarked that she proclaimed her own choice of father and protector.

With some farther expressions of his personal sympathy and interest, the duke took his leave; entreating that the count would permit him to improve an acquaintance, so happily to himself commenced.

The count replied with the warmth which this gracious advance demanded, and they parted, mutually pleased.

More than pleased was Orsino. Enchanted, enamoured, with the rare beauty of Olivia, he could think of nothing, dream of nothing, but her, her alone. But as yet he hazarded no avowal of his admiration. For the present he contented him-

self with visiting the family, and forwarding their wishes as much as lay in his power relative to the trial of the cause which soon commenced between them and the chevalier.

It was hoped that the delay of the law's decision would tire out Dorfaux's patience, and exhaust his means, so that he should be compelled into yielding. It effected the two former; but when he found himself baffled, he took a resolution to have revenge, since he could not obtain profit.

He laid his plans well. He watched his opportunity. His knowledge of Casa Benucci enabled him to take his measures securely. One evening he got into the house; lay in wait; watched Olivia, her father, and brother, go out for a ride on horseback; knew that the child had just been put to bed; contrived to elude the vigilance of the nurse; took it from its cradle; made free with one of the count's horses, and rode away at full gallop. He was seen by one of the servants, just as he made his escape; and when the riding-party returned, they were told what had befallen.

Cynthio, scarcely staying to hear the direction Dorfaux had taken, set off in pursuit. He was much lighter, and a far better horseman than the Frenchman, besides being animated by feelings that urged him to the speed of the wind. Although some time had elapsed, yet he did not despair of overtaking him.

At a turn in the road, he saw him! He gained upon him! Faster spurred the chevalier! Swifter flew Cynthio! To the very rowels the miscreant strove to plunge his spurs. The gallant beast reared, then bounded onwards.

What was it Cynthio beheld? He saw a something white, like a stricken dove, fall from the saddle,—either jerked out of the chevalier's hold by the horse's curvet, or dropped by the dastard arm that preferred seizing its own last chance of safety.

Breathless, appalled, Cynthio darted on, and flung himself out of his saddle. Too truly had his foreboding heart told him the fatal truth! It was his darling! His bequeathed treasure! His only Astrella!

Bleeding, and lifeless it lay there, a white heap in the dust.

Tenderly he lifted the little mangled body, and bore it home.

From that hour Cynthio's spirit drooped. His heart died within him. His body gradually declined.

Olivia tended him with loving assiduity. She devoted her time wholly to him; and after their father's death,—which occurred about that period,—she had no object in life, to divide her thoughts with her beloved brother.

They lived a more secluded life than ever. Cynthio's state of health would not permit his entering into society; and Olivia derived no enjoyment from that which fatigued and oppressed him.

Among their few visitors, was duke Orsino. He came still; but still delayed the declaration of his feelings, out of respect to Olivia's recent bereavement, promising himself that when her term of mourning for her father should have expired, he would then prefer his suit.

Sir Toby had returned from Venice, and was now permanently established at Casa Benucci. He had lately received a letter from England, from an old schoolfellow of his, one sir Abel Ague-cheek, written on his death-bed. It recommended to his friend sir Toby's notice, his son, Andrew, who was about to visit Italy, where the family possessed an estate, and where the new sir Andrew would in all probability settle. The letter spoke in high eulogium on the benefit of foreign travel in forming a young man, and ended by entreating that sir Toby would undertake the supervision and farthering of this desirable end; as all that the young man lacked, was a little forming.

"'Forming,' quotha?" was sir Toby's comment to himself, as he folded up the letter, and put it in his pocket; "I'll form him, I warrant. He shall be reformed altogether. Marry, he shall be no more a fellow of the same substance, 'neath my polishing."

As a first step in sir Toby's views upon the young knight, he introduced him to his niece Olivia; and encouraged the young gentleman in the passion with which he was at once smitten for her. He promoted his amusement; and initiated him into divers gay methods of spending his time and his money; he kept him entertained, and contrived himself to profit by his entertainment.

"What like is this young English knight?" said Maria to Feste, the clown, after sir Andrew's first visit to Casa Benucci. "Thou hast seen him, I know; for thou wert in the hall, and reached him his hat, as he took leave. Tell me what he is like."

"Faith, he's like to the picture,—if such a one could be painted a speaking likeness,—of a born simpleton, and a grown natural; but truly, of all living men, he is likest to himself;" replied the clown.

"Is he good-natured? Hath he wit enough to be that?" asked she. "Many a man may be pardoned folly, if he have but so much inkling of sense as to let good-nature shine through it."

"Well, he's what often passes for good-natured. He's a doughy loaf without any crust. And a loaf without its top crust,—its first letter,—is oaf."

"And those three letters sum his character? Sir Toby told me he was a monstrous eater of roast-beef; and that's the staple of character, as I've heard, where he comes from."

"Was that what sir Toby was telling thee, when I saw him whisper thee, in the box-tree, t'other day?" asked the clown.

"None of thy rogue's questions, master Feste; they'll get but scant answers from me, I promise thee;" said Maria, turning away with a laugh, and a reddened cheek.

"I did but ask, for the sake of knowing what could be the parley that made a chuck under the chin meet commentary and adjunct;" returned he.

"Be gone about thy business,—if thou hast aught of business, beside idling and trifling;" she said, whisking away from him, and darting upstairs to her lady's room.

Sir Toby, whose jovial habits nothing could restrain, and upon whose boisterous hilarity the society of his gentle niece and sick nephew acted as a restraint, gave them less and less of his company; and associated almost wholly with Maria, Fabian, and Feste, whose gayer spirits assimilated better with his tastes.

While Olivia and Cynthio sat quietly enjoying a book, or music, in the saloon together, sir Toby would be luxuriating in

a cool stoop of wine in the buttery-bar; or discussing a bowl of Ipocras in the orchard, while Feste trolled him a merry song; ever chatting, bantering, toying, drinking, joking, or singing.

"Give me more of that pickle-herring. I'm athirst like the salt sea-sand, which never tires of sucking in;" he would say.

"Pickle-herring! How shall that mend your drouth?" exclaimed Maria.

"What, wench? Doth it not provoke drinking,—and is not drink a quencher of thirst?"

"'Tis but a satisfaction once removed;" said Feste; "and happy is he that hath satisfaction so near at hand. No farther out of reach than one remove off, is no intolerably deferred content, methinks, for poor humanity; which mostly hath its cravings beyond mortal gratifying."

"Yonder is Malvolio pacing up and down the terrace-walk, stupidly sedate, like a fish going his rounds in a glass vase;" said Maria; "an' you keep up this noisy talk, he'll overhear you; and then he'll think it his duty to bid you to be quiet, out of consideration to my lady. He's of so fractious a virtue, that reproof hath more relish to his palate than anchovy; and he indulges his taste, under pretence of regard for my lady's wishes. Be less loud, for the love of peace and quiet."

"Marry, when the knight is in his cups, he becometh over strepent;" said the clown. "As my lady's loving uncle, beseech you, sir Toby, be less nuncupative. Pity that your joys should not be joys unless they be audible. Emulate the mouse in his cheese, who nibbles on in plenitude of smothered satisfaction."

"Hang such hole and corner doings say I!" roared sir Toby. "Give me an honest open debauch! Come, Maria; let's have t'other flagon."

Sometimes sir Toby would meet sir Andrew at a place he called his cubiculo,—where he had sleeping quarters in the neighbourhood; and would take Feste with him to make merry, and sing to them. The clown had a trick of rhodomontade in his jesting, which mightily took the two knights; and he spared not to use it for their amusement. Sir Andrew doted on him; and lavished money on his singing, and praise on his wit.

"He's passing excellent at it;" he would say. "I know not whether I don't prefer it to mine own. Mine is more like a natural fooling—but his is a gift of art."

"And who shall say thou art not natural,—a very natural?" returned his friend sir Toby.

"Who indeed?" said the clown. "For so sure as Anaxarchus was no flincher, so Diodorus Siculus was as much a tapster as a stay-at-home; and how shalt thou prove the stars to be sparks, but by allowing that the moon is made of sea-water? Thou art no sager than cheese, if thou canst not dispute me these things scholarly and wisely."

Meantime Cynthio grew rapidly worse. He could not now stir from the couch on which he had used occasionally to rest. His sister constantly occupied a seat near,—reading to him from some choice volume, or playing to him on her lute, some favourite air; breathing it, soft-toned and musical, in her sweet voice.

The duke Orsino came one morning as was his frequent wont; and Olivia left her brother's side to receive the illustrious guest. No sooner had the duke withdrawn, than she hastened back to her sick brother.

There was a look of blushing confusion visible in her, as she reappeared, that confirmed a thought which had occupied Cynthio's mind while she was away. He had not been so long a passionate lover himself, without having learned to detect the symptoms of a silent passion in another. He had for some time marked the ill-concealed preference of Orsino, for his sister, as well as the unconsciousness of its existence on her part. He had seen that this love could not rest much longer unavowed; and when Orsino's message was delivered that morning, Cynthio felt that this was the occasion when all would be avowed.

He held out his hand to her, as she took her usual low seat beside his couch.

"I fear that you have dismissed his grace with less than your usual grace, sister mine;" he said, playfully. "Your love for your brother will make you scant in courtesy to your guests.

Orsino is our guest. The duke of Illyria is our honoured guest."

"Our honoured guest;" she replied.

"Our welcome guest;" Cynthio added.

"Our welcome guest;" she repeated.

"No more?" he asked, looking into her downcast face.

She did not answer.

"Orsino is not merely duke of Illyria;" said Cynthio; "he is a noble gentleman, high and honourable in principle; refined and pure in feeling; accomplished, well-gifted, brave, learned; young, and very handsome."

"Orsino is all you have described him;" she replied, softly.

"And this noble gentleman, rich-gifted by nature, as by fortune, has told my sister, that all the good gifts are valueless in his eyes, unless she will give them their crowning value by accepting them?" said Cynthio.

"I cannot deny that he tendered himself to me,—that he professed love for me,—this very morning;" said Olivia.

"And he felt what he professed. Orsino loves you. I have long seen it;" said Cynthio.

"And oh, my brother, you wish that I should accept his love?" she exclaimed.

"Ay, if you love him;" Cynthio said.

"But I do not—I cannot love him!" and she looked with so clear, so transparent a truth, into her brother's face as she spoke, that he could not but give credence to the entire sincerity of her smiling words. "To tell thee sooth, my Cynthio,—to tell thee the very inmost of my heart, I will own that it is not such a favour as Orsino's that could win my wayward fancy. To please my fastidious taste, there must be a delicacy, a grace, a subduing gentleness and sweetness, in the youth I could love, which I do not find in my lord duke. I could describe to thee precisely the sort of being, to whom, methinks, I could give my whole heart, were it not that instead of painting thee a picture, thou wouldst say I but held up a mirror before thee."

"A sorry image, sister mine;" he said with his own sad, sweet smile; "what should so effeminate-framed, so baby-faced a being as I, present, to win the liking of such a woman

as my Olivia? Nay, nay, thou wouldst as soon fall in love with a girl, as with such a girlish-looking youth as thy Cynthio."

"Could a girl look like the glorious creature I see before me," Olivia said, with enthusiasm, as she gazed upon her beloved young brother, and thought of all the noble qualities, enshrined within that delicate face and slender form, "I should sooner be bewitched into losing my heart to such a semblance, than to the substantial proportions and giant bulk of my lord duke. His grace's grace is not the grace that findeth grace with me. He is over-tall and portly to please mine eye; his bearing too lofty and commanding to suit my taste. No, when I can find a youth, with eyes at once soul-appealing and sportive, brow white and smooth, yet with such intelligence as ought to bring wrinkles, mouth both sweet and serious, limbs of slender mould, and deportment gentle as sincere, giving earnest of the high spirit within, then, and then only will I love—love as you would have me. Till then, I'll content myself with mine own love, my love for my brother, and with his for me."

"Best and dearest of sisters!" exclaimed Cynthio, as he drew her to his heart.

And when this well-beloved brother expired,—yielding his last breath in her arms, and blessing her for all that she had been to him,—what wonder that Olivia, in her first paroxysm of grief, shut herself up from the world, vowing to abjure the very face of the sun for the space of seven years, and observing well-nigh cloistral seclusion in her own apartment. Orsino sent hourly embassages of condolence and sympathy; but dreading a renewal of his suit, she sent coldly courteous replies. Her kinsman sir Toby, and her household, with a respectful observance of her mourning sorrow, pursued their own devices apart, and as far from her ken as might be.

Once however, the knight had been spending a roystering evening with sir Andrew Ague-cheek; he had sat up, the night through, roaring songs and catches with Feste the clown, and with him had reeled home to the mansion at daybreak. This disorderly and ill-timed conduct, had much offended the lady Olivia; and when, some hours later, the jester came into her

presence, trying to disarm her anger and make his peace, by a few of his usual sallies, she turned from him in displeasure, saying :—

"*Take the fool away.*"

TWELFTH NIGHT, Act i. Sc. 5.



TALE XIII.

HERMIONE; THE RUSSIAN PRINCESS.

THICKER and thicker fell the snow. Fiercely keen blew the Northern wind, heaping the drifts into crannies and gullies, then whirling them far and wide, as if in disdainful caprice. The gloomy fir-trees were all behung with mocking wreaths of sheeted white, that the next blast flung abroad in scattered showers. The murky sky lowered sullenly above all, grey, and cheerless, and hopeless; as a man,—setting his teeth hard, and facing thè rough inclemency as he best might,—cast his eyes up towards the heaven's unpromising aspect, and then looked around him, with an air that plainly bespoke his having lost his way amid the solitudes of this primæval pine-forest. A bleak and desolate monotony met his view on all sides; the same endless rows of tall straight black boles, crowned by funereal branches; the same blank, trackless waste of snow under-foot; the same grey veil of mist, and lead-coloured uniformity of sky, and falling flakes, overhead.

Something very like a muttered curse upon his own folly, broke from the lips of the man, as he turned in bewildered uncertainty from each new attempt to retrace the path by which he had entered the forest.

He might have been a denizen of the place, for the coarseness and even squalor of his clothing. The rough tunic and cloak of commonest sheep-skin, the bear-hide gloves, and wolf-skin cap, befitted the meanest serf,—but his evident unacquaintance with the spot, showed him to be no inhabitant of any neighbouring hamlet.

With one more perplexed look about him, he suddenly shouted aloud. And then,—amid the gloom and silence,—there came an answering sound,—a cry high-pitched, but dulled by distance, and by seeming lack of power in the shouter.

The man turned his steps in the direction of the response and saw coming towards him, a small dark figure, muffled in fur. It looked like a black bundle, more than a human child; the head was enveloped in a dark sheep-skin cap, that fitted so closely round the face, as to show only a circular nucleus containing eyes, nose, and mouth; the body was wrapped in a cloak of the like sombre, woolly wear; and the lower limbs were encased in thick leggings and boots of the same.

The man hastened to meet the child, saying :—"Well met, little one! How may I best get out of this confounded wood. You live hereabouts?"

"I am a stranger in these parts;" the child answered. "I came from the capital. I live in Kief—that is, I did live there—I am going to find a home with my father."

"And where is your father?" said the man.

"They banished him—he's in exile—I am going to him;" she replied.

"Going to him! Do you know how far it is to the frozen regions whither culprits are banished, little one?" asked the man.

"Yes; I know it is a long way off—but I have managed to come nearly a fourth of my journey, and I shall get through the rest, never fear."

"And who is your father?" said the man.

The child was just about to answer, but she caught the scrutinizing look of the stranger, and checked herself, saying: "Didn't you say you had lost your way in this forest? I'll tell you what I'll do for you. Instead of taking you on with me, I'll turn back with you, to the good woman, at whose hut I slept last night. She gave me a night's lodging, and I dare say she'll do as much for you. She has a kind heart; and won't refuse a meal, and a seat by her hearth, to a poor wayfarer."

An odd smile passed over his face, as the man replied :—"If you present me to her as a poor wanderer—I have no doubt she will take me under her roof.

The good peasant-woman received her little guest of overnight with much hearty kindness; and Paulina, the child, was soon bustling about, helping the woman to spread the table, and prepare the meal. She trotted about assiduously; making herself quite at home; seeming to know the places where everything was kept; and taking the lead in all useful and active proceedings.

She still kept the poor stranger—under her wing, as it were. He had partaken of the coarse fare set before him, and had drawn towards the fire, when the little girl, sitting on a low stool by his side, took one of his hands between both hers, and began chafing it, saying :—"For all you have eaten, you are still cold; let me rub your fingers for you; I'll soon get warmth into them, I'll engage. What a curious ring you have upon this finger. It's something like one that my father used to wear. But his was an emerald; and this is, of course, a bit of green-glass. Still, it's very pretty; and here are some curious characters engraved upon it. These characters are like those I have heard my father describe upon the Imperial signet; he said his own ring was very like the emperor's. Yours is about the size,—and with just such characters; but though it's an imitation jewel, it's very bright and pretty. It's just as good as if it were real."

"Just;" said the man. The emperor's own signet-ring couldn't content me better."

"Ah, but it would me;" said the child. "If I had that, I'd soon use it to some purpose. I'd affix it to the deed which should repeal my father's sentence of banishment."

She turned the ring round and round upon the man's finger, as his hand still lay in hers; sighed thoughtfully, saying :—"But there is no hope of my father's recall from exile, though there is a good hope of my joining him in his banishment."

The next morning, at day-break, little Paulina was astir, and preparing to set out. She went to rouse the stranger, whom she found still fast asleep on the settle.

"Awake, awake! It is time we were off;" she said, as she shook him by the shoulder.

"How now!" exclaimed the man angrily, as he started up, and looked around him in the surprise of finding himself in an unaccustomed place.

"It is a fine morning—the snow has ceased—we ought to be on our way. Come! up with you!" said the child.

The man laughed; while she alertly set before him the hunk of black bread, and the draught of warm milk-and-water, which the good woman had provided for their breakfast, and brought him his sheep-skin cloak, and helped to fasten it under his chin.

The weather had quite cleared up; for a Russian climate, the day was fine; and the two wanderers made their way across the forest with good speed to a village that lay immediately beyond. At the door of a sort of post-house, there stood a sledge-equipage, surrounded by a small retinue of attendants, as if awaiting the advent of the master.

"It looks like a fairy car;" said Paulina. "How pleasant it would be, if some kind spirit were to offer us a seat in it, and convey us to our journey's end. I wonder where it is going."

"As the equipage is going empty to Igorhof, I wonder whether these people would allow us to ride in it;" said the man, as he advanced towards one of the attendants, to parley with him.

Paulina could not hear exactly what passed between them; but she saw the stranger show the groom his ring,—she saw that there was an explanation and acquiescence given.

The man returned to her side. "He has consented."

"If so, they'll make you pay for what you want—and I suppose you've no money. I, luckily, have enough to serve us both. See here."

The child showed a handsome embroidered purse; and when the man expressed surprise at seeing such a thing in her possession, she told him that very fortunately her father had given her this purse full of gold for a plaything one day; "My father has always taught me, that the best use I can make of money is to bestow it on those who need it; so here it is; take it."

"I must know more of your father;" said the man hastily. "What is his name?"

The child looked steadily into the man's face: "I must know more of you," she said, "before I trust you with my father's name. He has already been undone by too generous trusting of those who proved themselves traitors."

"Traitors!" exclaimed the man.

"Don't be offended;" she said gravely. "I don't say you are a traitor; I only say I don't know enough of you to trust you with my father's secrets. You avoid answering me directly about yourself, yet you wonder that I don't tell you at once all about my father. Let us each keep our own secrets, and be as good friends, on all other points, as may be.

"I will tell you one thing," said the man. "I have a little daughter, perhaps a little younger than yourself. I should like my little girl to thank you for your care of her father. I wish she could see you. What say you to coming with me to my home, and making friends with her?"

"I should like it very much; but you live far from here, and I must not let anything interfere with my journey to my father."

"But my home—at least, the place where my little girl now is—lies all in your way; you must pass it, going to your father in his exile. "But, here we are at Igorhof," he added, as the sledge drew up at the gates of a large mansion but indistinctly seen, now, through the grey twilight of a Russian evening.

"You are getting out, here?" said the child. "Have you much farther to go, before you reach the place where your daughter is?"

"No; 'tis close by. Give me your hand, little one;" said the man, as she stepped out of the sledge after him; "'tis my turn to guide you, now."

He led her on,—she could not see exactly where, by reason of the deepening darkness. He stopped at a small side door, which he opened, and entered. Within, was a kind of vestibule, lighted by the softened light of a lamp, that hung at the foot of a winding staircase.

"Have you a right here? Are you not making your way

into a strange house?" said Paulina, hanging back, as the man prepared to mount the stairs, still holding her by the hand.

"Trust to me—as I trusted you, in the forest;" said the man, smiling. "Trust to me, and,—to use your own word,—never fear!"

"I don't;" she replied. "That is, I don't fear you would lead me into harm, in return for my helping you when you were in danger; but I do fear doing wrong—and I shouldn't choose to go with you any farther, if you are stealing into a place where you've no business to be."

"I assure you, I am not committing a trespass, little scrupulous;" said the man. "I know the master of this house; and it is here I expect to meet my daughter. Trust me; trust my word."

"I will, though you are a stranger, and I don't like some of your ways; yet you've a true looking face, and I'll trust that."

They reached the top of the staircase; and throwing open a door, the man led her forward into a spacious room, richly furnished, hung with tapestry, and lighted by a large silver lamp suspended from the ceiling.

The man threw a hasty glance around, as if in search of some one; then, muttering:—"She will be here anon;" threw himself upon one of the cushioned couches, as if thoroughly wearied. He sat, beating his foot a little, impatiently, at first; then he fell into a fit of thought, as his eye rested upon some papers that lay piled upon the table. Presently, he drew the heap towards him, and began turning them over, when his hand was arrested by Paulina's exclaiming:—"I don't like your fingering those papers, and prying into them, without leave. It makes me sometimes suspect—in spite of your face, that made me like you, and think you an honest man,—that you are, after all,——"

"Well; what?" smiled the man.

"A thief!"

The man was still laughing at this uncompromising reply, when the door of the apartment opened, and a little girl entered. She was very young, but there was an easy grace, and high-breeding, in her air, that bespoke her exalted rank, even

more unmistakably than the costly apparel she wore. There was a noble frankness that looked out of her eyes, a pure serenity and candour that dwelt upon her clear brows, which adorned and distinguished her far more than the rich furs and jewel-clasped velvet, that formed her attire.

As she advanced into the room, she gazed with a quiet wonder at the two strange figures there; but looking more intently at the man—whose coarse, rude garments at first prevented her recognizing him—she sprang forward, and threw herself into his arms, exclaiming:—"Father! dear father!"

He embraced her fondly in return; and for a few moments they were wholly engrossed with each other. Presently, he turned to where Paulina stood in mute astonishment at this scene, and said:—"But I must not forget my little preserver. Thank her, Hermione. I owe her my life. She helped me out of that confounded wood, where I might have perished, starving of cold and hunger. She guided me through all these mortal dangers; to say nothing of her keeping guard upon my morals, as well as my perils."

He was laughing heartily as he concluded; but Paulina never altered from the serious look with which she regarded him.

"Well, little one, have you made up your mind yet about me?" he said. "Are your notions as to what my vocation may be, still of the same favourable nature as you hinted—nay, told me plump—just now?"

"I have heard of robbers going out prowling in poor shabby clothes, and having a rich home, with plenty of luxuries to come to;" she said, with her straightforward way; "so you may still be what I took you for—a thief. But somehow I don't think you are, now."

"And pray what may have altered your opinion?" said he.

"Your daughter;" she replied. "Since I have seen her, I think you must be an honest man; an honourable man; a gentleman—for all you are meanly dressed. Perhaps some great lord."

"Well done! Well aimed!" he exclaimed. "Come," added he, "I'll make a bargain with you. If you'll tell me your father's name, I'll tell you who I am."

"As I believe you to be honourable, and that therefore my

trusting you will not injure him," she said, keeping her eyes fixed upon his face, "I will tell you his name. It is Vladimir Betzkoi."

The man's brow darkened, but after a pause of a few seconds, it cleared, and he muttered:—"I will not believe it; he must have been calumniated. At all events, I will have it looked to." Then he added aloud:—"Now that you have trusted me with his name, I will use all my power to have his case inquired into, that if wrong has been done, it may be redressed."

"You will interest your friends!" exclaimed little Paulina, her eyes sparkling with joy. "I remember; you said you knew the master of this house. He must be a rich man—a powerful lord—you will interest him? You will speak to him in my father's behalf? Perhaps he's at home now! Come, let us go to him at once!" she exclaimed, starting up, and seizing the man's arm in her eagerness.

"Softly, softly, little one;" answered he, smiling; "you forget how tired I am with my wanderings; you in your loving zeal for your father, feel no fatigue, care for neither food nor drink; but I own I'm worn out; I must have some of all these, before I can stir a step in any matter."

"I am thoughtless, selfish—I forget all, in my one concern for my father; but you will forgive his daughter for her sake, won't you?" said Paulina pointing to Hermione, and then proceeding to bustle about, as she had done at the peasant's hut, lifting his cap from his head, drawing his gloves from his hands, and helping him off with his cloak.

His daughter joined her in her ministry, with her own quiet, gentle, yet decided manner; a graceful, dignified self-possession marking her air in all she did. She was sparing in speech; and had, throughout this scene, offered no word of her own upon what passed, though her countenance had more than once expressed surprise, with constant interest. She had stood by her father's side the whole time, with one arm upon his shoulder, as he sat; while he held her in one of his, passed round her waist.

"You have fasted, then?—you have been delayed on your journey?—some accident?—these clothes?" she now said in a

tender voice. "Dear father, tell me what has happened. But first you must need refreshment; I will give orders that some be brought hither, that you may have a snug little meal in your Hermione's room. They shall bring supper here."

"Ay, let it be so;" he answered. "And Hermione," he went on, beckoning her to lean down and listen to something that he whispered in her ear. She looked in his face with a smile of amusement reflected from his own, and glided swiftly from the room to give her orders.

"Your hands are very different now, from the poor, numbed, frozen things, they were in the forest hut;" said little Paulina, as she laid one of hers on the back of his; "they are in a nice glow, arn't they."

"Ay, but my feet are not so warm; they are very cold—cold as stone;" said the man.

"That mustn't be;" replied she. "Stay, let me draw off your boots, and chafe them for you; I used often to do this for my father, when he came home cold-footed; and he always said no one chafed his feet so comfortably as his little Paulina. Here, hold out your foot;" and she knelt down beside him; "I'll soon have the boot off. Now the other! That's it! And then I'll sit upon this little stool, and you can pop both feet upon my lap—and I'll have them warm as a toast in a trice."

"You've taken up all your first liking to me again, since you've found out for certain I'm not a thief?" he said laughing. "You pet me, and make as much of me, now, as you did in the hut, when you told me you liked me because you had been able to help me."

"Yes;" she answered, with her quiet gravity. "By-the-by," she added with sudden animation, "you have never kept your part of the bargain! You were to have told me who you were, you know."

"Well, I'll tell you soon—presently."

"'Soon!' 'Presently!' Oh, that's very unfair! I told you at once my secret—and now you put me off about yours. That's very unfair!"

Just then, Hermione returned, followed by a train of servants. Some spread the table; while others drew near to the

couch where the man sat, bearing a furred dressing-gown, and slippers.

Paulina put out her hand for the latter.

The attendant would have withheld them; but, at a sign from the man, gave them to her. She put them carefully on his feet, saying:—"They're as warm as your hands now, arn't they? Now for your wrapping-gown."

The other attendant stepped forward, about to hold it ready; but Paulina took that also from his hands, with "No, no; give it me; I'll put it on. I'll step on the stool, on tip-toe; and I shall be able to reach."

"Let her do it;" said the man quietly, and with his amused smile.

"You've never answered my accusation, you know;" she resumed. "I said it was very unfair, and so it is, not to keep your bargain with me. If you're not a thief, you break your promises, and that's nearly as bad."

There was a stir, and a look of amazement among the attendants; but the next moment it subsided.

He nodded, laughingly saying:—"But let us have some supper first."

He chatted gaily, and seemed in high spirits as he sat between the two little girls; his daughter Hermione on one side of him, Paulina on the other—both waiting on him, with those half-playful, half-tender attentions, that belong to the intercourse between children and a grown person whom they like.

"How came you to tell me such a fib about your daughter?" said Paulina, suddenly. "You told me she was pretty, didn't you?"

"Yes; don't you think her so?"

"No; she's very different from pretty. She has the most beautiful face I ever saw. It's like what I fancy a queen's must be. It looks as if a crown would set well upon it."

"You hear how whimsically plain-spoken she is;" said the father of Hermione to her. "She told me just as openly—but far less complimentarily—what she thought of my face."

"Of course; why shouldn't I?" said Paulina. "I dare say, now," continued she to Hermione, "your love for your father

makes you think him handsome; but he is anything but handsome; rather plain than otherwise."

There was the same stir, and tokens of amazement among the attendants as before; but as before, it subsided, at a glance from Hermione's father. Paulina saw neither the amazement, nor the glance, but went on.

"You see he has a very little nose—almost a snub; and though his eyes are fine, yet there is a wart near the left one; and then he has an odd tooth that projects just there, and gives a queer, droll effect, to his mouth. He has just that sort of face which might be handsome, but which isn't handsome; it is much better than handsome, I think. It's a kind of face one's always glad to see, and always sorry to part with."

Hermione gazed fondly upon the face in question, and smiled acquiescence with the truth of what was last said of it.

"Then you wouldn't like to know you were never to look upon it again,—for all its ugliness; eh, little one?" said the owner, laughing.

"I should be very very miserable if I thought——"

The child stopped; with a break in her voice that was even more eloquent than speech.

The man was touched with the artless evidence of liking in this sincere-spoken little creature. After a pause, he said:—"Come, give me a kiss upon this ugly cheek of mine. I have a father's right to it. I am your father while your own is away."

"My father?" she exclaimed.

"Your father!" he repeated; "the father of all my sujects,—the father of my people. I am the emperor of Russia."

Paulina stood gazing at him fixedly, in utter astonishment. Her face worked eagerly; her breath went and came. Then she dropped upon her knees, flung her head on his, and clasped them round, as she exclaimed:—"My father! My own father! Think of him! Grant him his freedom! Pardon him!"

The emperor kindly bent over her, and spoke soothingly.

Presently she started up. "Yet why do I say, 'Pardon him?' He has done nothing that needs pardon. He has been ever loval and faithful. Do him justice! Search into the truth.

Redress the wrong that has been done him; and restore to yourself a devoted officer and servant!"

"If only for his child's sake——" the emperor began.

But Paulina vehemently interrupted him with:—"Not for mine! Not because I happened to do you a service! But because he himself deserves to be freed—he who has been punished as a traitor, when he was none."

"Never fear, little Conscientious!" said the monarch, laughing. "Entire justice shall be done. Your father shall have the benefit of a close investigation into his case. Will that satisfy you?"

"Quite;" she said in her grave way.

Paulina's father was recalled from exile; his innocence triumphantly proved, while he himself was reinstated in all his former possessions. On his return, he found his little daughter in high favour at court. She was encouraged and indulged by the emperor, who took a strange fancy to that blunt sincerity in her, the least approach to which, he would have so strongly resented in any other being. Next to his own child Hermione, the emperor best loved the little Paulina. In the first he took a fond pride; with the latter he was amused; he was entertained by her steady gravity when she spoke of things that seemed to her serious; and was excited by her frank and spirited mode of speech at all times. He was glad to have a girl of her sterling principles, as a companion for his young daughter. Hermione,—herself of a noble disposition,—took a great liking to Paulina; and had for her that most enduring of regards, an attachment founded on confidence, esteem, and respect. They grew up together, less like princess and dependent, than friends. When the princess attained more years, Paulina was enrolled among her ladies of honour.

Hermione spent a large portion of her time at Igorhof,—a delightful summer palace at some distance from the capital. Here, with her four favourite ladies, Paulina, Emilia, Olga, and Rogneda, she passed the hours in the studies and recreations proper to their season of life; and when the emperor could be lured from Kief to make one of the rural party, his daughter's satisfaction was complete.

The fame of her beauties and excellence had already extended far and wide. Embassies from numerous foreign courts brought offers of alliance. Wherever there was a kingdom possessing a prince of a marriageable age,—an heir to a crown requiring a consort,—straightway an emissary was sent, treating for the hand of the incomparable Hermione.

Hitherto the emperor had turned a deaf ear to all these proposals, affirming that as yet his daughter was too young, and that he could not bear to think of parting with her. But at length a proffer came on the part of the king of Sicily, in behalf of his son, prince Leontes, so advantageous to Russia, so conformable to the emperor's views, that he bade the two embassadors, Camillo and Antigonus, do him the favour to abide his consideration of their master's suit; and meanwhile to make sojourn in his good city of Kief.

There was another reason, besides the political advantages presented by this alliance, which induced the emperor to think of it; this was, a doubt he had entertained latterly concerning a certain youth, named Alexis. He was the orphan child of a younger sister of the emperor's who, when a mere girl, had fled from the palace, and united herself with a man of neither fortune nor birth. The young Alexis had shared the tuition, with which a father's care had supplied Hermione; and the two cousins had grown up in all the intimacy and affection of their mutual relationship.

It struck the father, that when he had proposed to Alexis remaining with him at Kief, instead of accompanying Hermione and her train to Igorhof, the young man had discovered not only eagerness, but embarrassment and confusion, in the impetuosity with which he had urged his wish to go with her.

The emperor lost no time in repairing to Igorhof, that he might see and question his daughter, determining at once to resolve his doubt.

He found her, seated amidst her ladies, embroidering; while her young cousin read aloud, from a scroll,—a Greek poem, that had lately reached the Russian court.

The suddenness of her father's arrival and entrance, caused a bright colour to mount into the cheek of Hermione,—but it

was the blush of joy, with no one mingling of consciousness or confusion, which heightened her complexion, and sparkled in honest pleasure from her eyes. Almost in that one look, her father was satisfied. He cast a hasty glance at Alexis; who had made a somewhat abrupt withdrawal from his close vicinity to the ladies' embroidery-frame, at the moment of the emperor's entrance. The youth's face did not exhibit quite so unembarrassed an expression as the princess's; but he came forward, and bade him welcome, with his wonted graceful mixture of affection and deference.

The emperor, signifying his desire to be left alone with his daughter,—her ladies, and Alexis, withdrew.

In the conversation which ensued, her father told her the views he had for her marriage, and Hermione answered with so light, so almost gay a tone, that he felt reassured with respect to her entirely disengaged heart.

"For the present, dear father!" she exclaimed gaily, "I have another match in my head, and so nearly at heart that I have neither head to dream with, nor heart to give away, in love affairs of mine own."

"And pray for whom may your highness be plotting, and taking up the unsatisfactory office of match-maker?" said the emperor.

"Alexis and Paulina;" replied his daughter. "I suspect he is beyond plummet's depth in love with her; and I am much mistaken if she be not brought to return his attachment. He is never happy but in company with me and my ladies; and I know who is by far the most admirable among them,—Paulina. It must needs be her.

"Meantime," said the emperor, "withdraw your unselfish thoughts for your friends' happiness; and bring your mind to bear seriously upon what I have to propose for your own, my child."

He told Hermione of the embassage from the king of Sicily, suing for her hand in the name of his son, Leontes. He told her how fair a renown the young prince enjoyed, as a scholar, and a gentleman. He told her how well a father's pride and affection would be contented, in having her united to one who bore such a reputation he told her how entirely his kingdom's

interest would be consulted by the fulfilment of this proposed alliance.

Hermione listened calmly. Then she placed her hand in his, and said:—"I have no will but yours. Dispose of me as best seems to you. I have no wish, but to fulfil your desires. They, I know, are for both our good. Be it as you think fit."

Her father pressed her to his heart, proudly, fondly.

On the emperor's return to his capital, he called a council, and stated his determination to bestow his daughter, the princess Hermione, in marriage with the heir-apparent to the crown of Sicily, prince Leontes.

The appointment of many particulars occupied some considerable time; so that several weeks elapsed between the arrival of the Sicilian embassadors in the Imperial city of Kief and the period of their departure, when they carried back with them the emperor's pledged and written word of compliance.

These weeks had been spent by Camillo and Antigonus, and their suite, at the house of Vladimir Betzkoi. He pressed the two embassadors to make his mansion their home; and sent for his daughter Paulina to come thither, that its comfort and attraction might be secured; by having so fair and so competent a mistress of his household to preside over its arrangements.

During their stay with General Betzkoi, the frank graces and spirited beauty of his daughter Paulina, had made a powerful effect upon both the visitors. But Camillo, with the strict uprightness that distinguished him, resolved to defer all consideration of his own interests, until those of his royal master's wishes had been fulfilled. He determined neither by word nor look to betray his feelings to Paulina or her father, until he should have returned from Sicily with the mutual agreement of the two courts respecting the projected royal marriage; and then he would endeavour to effect his own with the woman whom above all her sex, he desired to call his wife. The lord Antigonus was withheld by no such nice scruples from endeavouring at once to secure the prize he had in view; he therefore immediately, although privately, declared his love to the father of Paulina, and asked her hand of him; but made it his request

that the engagement should remain secret, until he could come to claim the hand of his betrothed bride, at the same time that he returned to fetch the future consort of his prince.

Vladimir Betzkoi eagerly closed with the proposal; and he told Paulina of the consent he had given, confident of her glad acquiescence with an arrangement that promised so happily.

"I knew a husband must be my fate, at some time or other;" was her answer. "I have long made up my mind to endure the impending evil. Let me thank my stars for the reprieve. Who knows what may happen in the interval? My future lord and master may repent of the engagement, and never come back to claim his betrothed spouse. Meantime, I have several good months of freedom."

A few days after the departure of the embassadors, Paulina returned to Igorhof, and the princess sat with her favourite lady,—the embroidery-frame furnishing a pleasant occupation for hands and eyes, while they were engaged in interesting talk.

"And now tell me, Paulina,—now that we are alone,—if thou bring'st back the same heart, thou bor'st with thee to Kief. A capital, and a court, are sore places for the losing of hearts. Hast thou thine safe yet?"

"Safe and sound; safe in mine own keeping, and sound from any scratch of the blindfold archer-boy's shafts;" said Paulina, laughing. "But though my heart's free, my hand's fettered. My father has accepted the offer with which lord Antigonus honoured me; and has passed his word that I shall become his wife, when he shall come to claim me."

"And when is that?" said Hermione.

"When he returns from Sicily to escort you thither, madam, as the bride of his prince;" answered Paulina. "There is this bright point in my lot; I am not to be separated from her I love better than any man of them all."

"Then thou lov'st not this lord Antigonus?" said Hermione, after a pause.

"I love him not; neither do I hate him; he is too venerable a gentleman to be hated;" said Paulina; "and I should have probably both liked and esteemed him more, had he not taken it into his head to like me—and to ask for me for a wife, before

I had time to think whether I liked him better than any other man in the world,—which is what a wife should do, to be a good wife and a happy wife. What ailed him to be so troublesomely ready, I should like to know?"

"So ready to step in with his suit, before some one else could propose, whom you might have preferred, do you mean?" asked Hermione.

Paulina started; then fell into a reverie, her thoughts resting on Camillo. After a few minutes she resumed, with a sigh :— "Whatever might have been, it is useless now to consider. My father's word of honour is pledged; and it shall not be forfeited by fault of mine."

"Poor Alexis!" thought the princess. "He has been too tardy in speaking of his love."

It happened the next day, Hermione was walking in the gardens, surrounded by her ladies; when Alexis joined them, bearing a beautiful exotic, which the emperor had sent to his daughter for her conservatory. The ladies lingered behind, laughing and talking gaily.

"Hark how their voices make a blended sound sweeter than music;" said Alexis. "That thrilling, joyous laugh above all! I should know it among a thousand! The artless gaiety of her soul rings out through her voice, like the carol of a bird in spring-time."

"Her voice is generally low;" said the princess; "it would require a lover's partiality, methinks, to discover the liveliness of a lark's singing to Paulina's grave and impressive tones."

"Paulina's! I was thinking of Emilia's! I was speaking of hers!"

"You love Emilia, then?" said Hermione, with a deep-drawn breath.

"More than life;" he returned; "but I have striven to conceal it from herself. I dread to startle that young, shy heart. Yet I shall hope for your good offices in my behalf, when I shall have dared to avow my passion; and meanwhile, I trust I have your good wishes?"

"They attend yours to a successful issue;" she answered as she returned to the house, musingly.

"It is indeed a hazardous thing to plan the assorting and bringing together of hearts;" she thought. "Had I betrayed Paulina into a vain preference for Alexis, by misleading her as to his sentiments, I should have had the remorse of knowing the pangs of a hopeless passion were hers to struggle with."

Her generous concern for her friend's happiness, led to reflections touching her own lot; and she fell into a train of thought, having for its object the qualities of person, temper, and mind, attributed by report to her future husband.

The time now approached for the ratifying of the promise which her father had made, on her behalf. The embassadors from Sicily were daily expected to arrive in Kief; and the princess Hermione, with her train, repaired from Igorhof to the capital, to be present at the state reception.

The ceremonial concluded. The king's formal agreement to the conditions proposed by the emperor, was read aloud to the council; and a day appointed for the solemn betrothal of the contracting parties, at a sufficient distance of time to admit of all pomp and pageant of preparation.

During this interval, the princess was to retire to her favourite residence—the summer-palace of Igorhof; as its country seclusion would enable her to prepare herself for the duties of her new life. She begged her father would procure for her a competent master, with whom she might study the Sicilian language, as henceforth the subject of Sicily, its dialect, and its literature, should be the dearest object of her interest, and endeavoured attainment.

Her father consulted Camillo; who replied that he was happy to have it in his power to second the views of the emperor, since in the suite of the embassy there was a man precisely fitted to fill the office of tutor to her highness the princess. The person in question was his own secretary it was true; but this subordinate situation,—which he at present held, in consequence of his desire to avail himself of the opportunity it afforded of visiting and advantageously seeing the Russian court and capital,—did not prevent his being in reality a deeply-read scholar, a perfect sage in research and erudition. Camillo ended by saying he would himself follow the princess to Igorhof,

and have the pleasure of presenting his secretary to the princess as her instructor, if she would graciously permit his services in that capacity.

The day after the princess reached Igorhof, Camillo was announced; praying leave to present the gentleman who was to have the honour of superintending her Sicilian studies.

From what her father had repeated to her of Camillo's words, concerning the person who was to be her instructor, Hermione had pictured to herself, a grave, elderly man, robed in black, with silver hairs,—a complete impersonation of a sage, a philosopher. What then was her surprise, when Camillo made his appearance, followed by a young man clad in a simple grey suit, bearing a portfolio of papers and some books, whom he presented as his secretary, Leon.

"You are welcome at Igorhof, sir;" she said. "I trust you will make it your sojourn, so long as it may be agreeable to you. Its gardens, and vicinity, are well worthy a stranger's inspection, and my cousin will have much pleasure in escorting you to those spots best deserving your notice."

As she concluded, she turned to her cousin Alexis, who, with her ladies, was in the apartment, and presented the two gentlemen to each other. Camillo acknowledged her gracious courtesy; and withdrew shortly after, to pay the visit to the grounds, which she had recommended.

As he retired, accompanied by her cousin, the princess addressed the young secretary:—"You have been so good as to anticipate my wish, sir, I perceive, and have brought with you the means of commencing our lessons at once. I cannot too soon begin the task I have before me; I fear me, the time will be but short, for its accomplishment. But I will refer me to your skill in teaching, rather than rely upon mine own poor powers of learning."

"Such as it is, it shall be at your highness's command in all devoted zeal;" replied Leon, as he spread the books and papers on the table, and placed a chair for the princess; taking his own station quietly behind it.

She had expected a grave, staid, elderly personage; and here was one in the prime of youthful manhood. In years,

then, her new tutor was the total opposite of the picture she had represented to herself; but in the two former particulars, it was impossible to be more exactly fulfilled by the fact. The young secretary might have been a stoic, a cynic, for the measured sobriety, and cold severity of his deportment. He might have been Mentor himself, for the rigid calm, the senile composure of his bearing. Had his face seen seventy winters, in lieu of the hardly more than twenty summers which it seemed to have witnessed, it could scarce have worn a more frozen aspect.

There was something in this look of his, that made it seem unfit he should be standing beside her, or rather at the back of her chair; his character of instructor, too, warranted greater respect; and she accordingly said;—"Be seated, sir, I pray you."

The secretary quietly placed himself in the chair she pointed to, over against her, and drawing one of the books between them, commenced the lesson.

Day after day, the studies thus proceeded; the princess and her tutor occupying a table in one of the windows, while her ladies sat at the embroidery-frame in another. These latter were frequently joined by young Alexis; who would hang over the embroidery-frame, trifling and chatting with the ladies of honour; watching Emilia, and flattering himself that he discerned tokens of her increasing affection. At other times, he would approach his cousin's writing-table, playfully tax her with too close an attention to her studies, and lure her forth into the flower-garden to idle with him and her ladies, as fitter pursuit, than leaning over musty books and papers. The cold, stern looks with which the young tutor regarded him on such occasions, passed unheeded.

The manners of this latter were not such as to conciliate a gay youth like Alexis; therefore, save with the princess, his pupil, and with Camillo, his master, the secretary held little communion with any one.

It was during the lessons, that he gradually evinced an animation, the reverse of his habitual frigid quietude. He no longer regarded his pupil with that grave, considering look,

that chilling, deliberate investigation, with which he had at first contemplated her. His delight in instructing, evidently grew with his discovery of her capacity for acquiring; and in return, her pleasure in the lessons as evidently increased in proportion to the interest and sympathy with which they were now given.

The hours spent in her Sicilian studies, were the happiest Hermione had ever known; they seemed like the opening of a new existence to her. She resolved the question as to whence this charm arose, by believing that it was because Sicily,—which was to become her adopted country,—its language, its history, its people, its laws, its customs, its scenery, formed the themes of discussion between herself and her instructor. When he dwelt with fervour upon the poetical traditions of his native isle, upon the classic stories of its shores; when he painted to her the golden glories of its climate, the purple hues of its mountains, the fertile luxuriance of its plains; when he described the bee-haunted, odoriferous Hybla, or the majestic, fire-vomiting Ætna; when he spoke of the ice-cold streams of the transformed Acis, of the lovely fields of Enna, where lovelier Proserpina and her nymphs gathered heaps of wild flowers; when he told her of the piping shepherd-gods, and enamoured nereids, those earlier denizens of the island, still haunting its remoter shades, to the eye of poesy, whilst mortals of noble mould and action peopled its towns and cities,—the princess deemed it was interest in his subject, that caused the enthralled attention, the wrapt fascination with which she listened to his words. She would sit entranced, unconscious of the lapse of time, drinking in each syllable; and dreamed it was because Sicily and Sicilian lore were his theme, that she was thus spell-bound.

He was once relating to her a legend of a mountain castle, built when god Saturn reigned in Sicilia, and Ceres was presiding genius of its teeming prosperity, when Alexis entered, and urged his cousin not to lose so fair a morning in-doors, when open air, and bright sun, and sweet-scented flowers, wooed her abroad.

"I know I speak heresy; but what are books, to conversing,—in the fresh air, amid the breath of flowers,—with the voices

and looks of fair women? Though sooth to say, books never possessed the charm for me, that they have for you—especially since you seek in them how to answer, in his own language, the Sicilian prince who is to whisper a lover's and a husband's vows."

The crimson mounted to Hermione's brow. She rose hastily; but spoke no word; and stood looking down, with a sedate dignity, her hand resting upon the back of the chair from which she had risen.

Alexis gently took the white hand, and said, "You will forgive me, if in playful thoughtlessness, I hurt your delicacy. I but alluded to an engagement known to all,—sanctioned by your father,—spoken of by all his subjects. Come; if you will not leave your beloved studies for the sake of the sunshine, and the flowers, come to pleasure me. See, Emilia is ready to attend you."

As her cousin, drawing the princess's arm within his, and offering the other to Emilia, led the two ladies from the apartment, the young secretary started up, with a wrath that had only been controlled by an imperative effort till then; and paced up and down perturbedly, then hurried from the room. He went straight to the suite of chambers appropriated to Camillo and himself during their stay at Igorhof; threw himself into a chair, and sat for some time, with his face buried in his hands. There were writing-materials before him; and, after a space, he drew them towards him, and began a letter, as follows:—

"Best friend and brother,

"As of yore, in boyhood, we were wont to share each other's childish joys and griefs, so, now, arrived at man's estate, sympathy of spirit, and written words may still unite us. Thou are not ignorant, my Polixenes, that my father's wishes in this Russian alliance guided mine own; and that no sooner had I yielded my consent that the treaty should go forward, than a desire to behold this princess, ere fate had bound her irrevocably mine, engendered a resolve that I would hazard all to effect my desire. Camillo's report strengthened my pur-

pose. In order to satisfy my growing anxiety to see and judge for myself, I determined to accompany him, on his return to Russia, in the guise of his private secretary.

"Fortune favoured me in my hope of forming a nearer judgment, by giving me the opportunity of beholding her in private,—in daily, domestic converse and communion. I became, by a happy chance, her instructor; I was to verse her in our Sicilian tongue, to familiarize her with Sicily and its history. Calmly, temperately, have I endeavoured to form my opinion. But ah! my best Polixenes, your friend, in watching the sweet perfections of her nature, of her person, is subdued heart and soul to the witchery of their influence, and has scarce control of faculty or discrimination left him, beyond the all-engrossing perception of her consummate excellence. But in the very finding how entirely my own heart did homage to her worth,—I came to dread that it might be my fate never to call so incomparable a creature mine, as I could wish her to be mine. I felt that I could not be satisfied, unless I owed her hand to preference, and not to state alliance; I would have such a woman my wife by her own wish;—and become her husband upon no other claim than that of love,—mutual love.

"And now,—how shall I tell it thee? There is a young fellow,—a cousin,—one Alexis,—who by reason of his kindred, and of the emperor's kindness, is admitted here on terms of such near intimacy as offends and revolts me almost beyond my powers of concealment. In vain I tell myself that he is her cousin,—that as a poor relation he is entitled to her regard and consideration. I cannot endure to behold the freedom of his address—the ease of her replies. This morning he dared to take her hand; and, though she was evidently disinclined to quit the discourse in which we were engaged, he must needs urge her to walk, against her wish. And she yielded her will to his! She left the subject we were discussing,—left her tutor with a bow of courteous dismissal for that day's studies; and suffered herself to be led away, her arm resting upon the audacious, triumphant cousin's! And the tutor stood there; the humble secretary, as in duty bound, stood mutely there! The princess and her kinsman had undoubted right to dispose

of themselves and their time as best they thought fit, without consulting the opinion or pleasure of so insignificant a person as Leon He and his books might be put away together. In that moment I felt that I could have cursed mine egregious folly which had placed it out of my own power to assert myself—to confront this minion of royal blood on equal terms. He was not insolent towards me—let me do him this justice —he thought not of me,—that was all. For her, neither insolence, nor arrogance, nor other unwholesome emotion, ever casts its shadow upon that fair serenity of countenance. Her nature, —stainless and transparent as her complexion, clear and lustrous as her eyes, beams pure, and candid, and radiant, in her face. But should her heart have already spoken in favour of another, —all unconsciously as it may have been,—can I bear that her hand, in mere cold fulfilment of an international bargain,—in obedience to a state compact, shall be conferred . . . I am interrupted. I hastily close this letter, and despatch it by our trusty messenger, Demetrius; and will write you farther ere long. Meanwhile, as ever,

"Thine, in truest and dearest friendship,
"LEONTES."

"*To Polixenes, prince of Bohemia;*
"*greeting: these, with secrecy and despatch.*"

Next day, the princess sat at her frame, among her ladies, when letters brought intelligence of the lady Paulina's marriage. It had taken place at her father's house, without much of ceremonial, and in some haste, in consequence of a summons to join the army, which took him away abruptly; he desiring to see her in safe and honourable protection ere he left her. In Paulina's letter to her friend and mistress, briefly stating this, Hermione could perceive the strict adherence to duty, which marked Paulina's conduct. While the princess mused upon the energy of rectitude that distinguished her favourite's character, her other ladies were engaged in discussing the news, with all that flutter of interest usually evinced on such occasions. Olga and Rogneda were expatiating on the unlucky

necessity for hurry, which prevented due preparation in dress, jewels, equipages, and other particulars that formed, in their opinion, the most important incidents of a wedding. Alexis was whispering Emilia something that grew out of the tidings of these nuptials,—something that brought no reply; but, instead, a blushing silence that served better than speech, and Camillo, on the very first opening of the letters, had quitted the apartment; his secretary, soon after, following him.

The princess had noted the withdrawal: in sorrowful comprehension of the feelings which caused Camillo's; and in cordial approval of the motives which drew Leon after him. She understood the desire to attempt consolation, the hope to soften his friend's anguish, which had prompted the secretary to follow. She went towards the conservatory, which adjoined her sitting-room, that she might uninterruptedly pursue the train of reverie into which she had fallen.

She was still here, when a quick footstep approached, and roused her from her waking dream. It was Alexis, who, radiant with joy, came to tell her the prosperous issue of his suit; how he had ventured to declare his love to Emilia, in consequence of what they had that morning heard; how he had learned the joyful truth, that unless he were the bridegroom she would never wed, unless he were the lover she could never know happiness in love.

Hermione with her usual warmth of interest in that which concerned her friends, listened to her cousin's raptures, and promised to use her intercession with the emperor, for their speedy crowning, by entreating his sanction to the union.

Alexis, in a transport of gratitude, was in the act of raising the princess's hand to his lips, when the shadow of two figures darkened the entrance. They were those of Camillo and Leon. The face of Camillo was pale, but composed; as if set in that resolved calm which is the result of a severe struggle between feeling and will. The countenance of his companion was agitated; and worked in uncontrollable evidence of secret emotion.

While Camillo courteously offered a few words of apology to

the princess, for having intruded on her privacy, Leon merely bowed, and passed on, towards the door leading to their own rooms.

Hermione, with deepened colour, but with all her own quiet dignity, made a gracious motion towards a seat near to the one she had taken, that Camillo should remain beside her; and then gently drawing him into conversation, in kindly, womanly-wise, she won him to other sources of thought than the one she knew was gnawing and throbbing at his heart.

"My young cousin has gained the love of one of my ladies, —the youngest,—Emilia; he hopes shortly to wed her; and it was in the happiness of this hope, as he confided it to me, that my cousin was saluting my hand with so much fervour when you approached just now. And now, sir," she added, rising, "if it suit the leisure of your friend, I will gladly pass an hour or two in the saloon with our Sicilian books."

Camillo withdrew to summon Leon.

He found him pacing the apartment with rapid strides. On Camillo's entrance, he turned, and exclaimed:—"Thou saw'st it, thou saw'st it, Camillo! Thou saw'st how, with tender gallantry, with all a lover's eagerness and devotion, he——"

"I saw his thanks, his gratitude, imprinted on her hand, for the sister's part she had played—for the affectionate interest with which she had heard he was plighted to his mistress,—Emilia," interrupted Camillo.

Leon gazed into his face. "Emilia! His choice! His plighted mistress!"

"His affianced wife;" answered Camillo. "They are shortly to be united. But her highness, the princess, awaits her tutor in the saloon. It is not fitting that my secretary—her teacher —should detain her;" he added with a sad smile.

Leon grasped his hand warmly; and ejaculating "My good Camillo!" hastened away.

As he entered the sitting-room to attend the princess, the secretary beheld confirmation of what he had just heard. Alexis was leaning over the back of Emilia's chair; and one glance at the countenances of the lovers, sufficed. The studies proceeded that day, with a zest, an animation, they had never known before.

For several successive days the lessons went on with the same engrossing delight to both master and scholar. Minutes melted into hours, morning into afternoon, afternoon into evening; and still the princess and her tutor would sit at the study table, as time crept on unperceived by either. They were no more interrupted by the solicitations of Hermione's young cousin, that she would leave her books, and stroll forth with him and her ladies. He was contented to lead away Emilia; and the sheltered conservatory afforded pleasant resort for the lovers' arm-in-arm walks, and whispered colloquies.

A second letter that Leon wrote, best pictures his state of feeling at this juncture.

"Dear friend and brother,

"Thy love for Leontes will rejoice to know that the cloud of doubt which then darkened his dawning hope, is now dispersed. I have had proof that my fears concerning this young cousin were groundless. Indeed, I now wonder how I could for a moment imagine that one so peerless should abase her thoughts to an object unworthy her excellence—a dependant on her father's favour for his very education and maintenance. But then,—what am I, to all appearance, but a mere hireling in the suite of the embassage,—a secretary? And yet upon this secretary, this poor dependant, I think she casts an eye of favourable regard. At times, I am all given up to the desire of beholding her softened and won into compassionate regard for the being before her. At others my heart swells to think her capable of yielding to a sentiment which must needs degrade her,—a preference for a stranger—an obscure person—one whose highest recognized position is that of secretary—amanuensis to the envoy at her father's court. Yet, on the other hand, can I desire to possess her—all beautiful as she is—when I have never been able to touch her heart? Can Leontes accept of herself, when Leon could not win her love? I am torn by a thousand wild and passionate mistrusts. I could wish to be loved for myself alone; yet dare not hazard the test. I dare not attempt to gain her affection for Leon, at the expense of her faith to Leontes. Either way I must triumph. Should

she be faithful to her contract with the prince of Sicily, I gain proof of her steadfastness in virtue, her firmness and nobility of principle; if she yield to love for Leon, I have the glory of finding that I am beloved for my own sake. Could I have your counsel in reply, my Polixenes, you would doubtless ask me whether I be not about to tempt her unfairly and unwisely; trifling with my own happiness; preparing future tortures for myself. I answer by owning myself a lover,—a passionate lover; and in this title,—as I feel,—are comprised a thousand inconsistencies of misgiving, assurance, doubt, surmise, confidence, hope, fear, conjecture. Once possessed of Hermione, —heart and soul, my own, as in name, my wife,—and farewell, for ever, to a thought of assay or proof. I could as soon entertain a doubt of thee, my Polixenes,—whose tried friendship is beyond all suspicion,—as of this noble creature, once assured mine. That she may become so is the sole and devout hope of

"Thy bounden brother-in-affection,

"LEONTES."

The next morning's study was interrupted by the arrival of a messenger from Kief. He brought letters for the princess from her father. The emperor had been suddenly taken ill (dangerously ill, the messenger added,) and wrote to beg his child to come to him, as speedily as might be.

"This instant! Without delay!" said the princess. "You, Alexis, can take charge of my ladies; and the rest of our suite will follow, as soon as may be. Good sir," she added, to Camillo, "you will excuse this brief leave-taking; I return to my father. The sledge that brought the messenger shall bear me back, without a moment's loss of time. All fitting preparation can be made for yourself, and your friend, who can travel in company with my cousin and ladies; and I shall hope to welcome you together, kind friends, when you arrive in Kief, with happier tidings of my dear father's health."

As she left the room, she cast an involuntary glance towards the study-table, that she might include Leon in the hasty farewell she took of all. But he was no longer there. He had vanished.

Thoughts of him, mingled with her solicitude respecting her

father, and thronged upon her as she flew along, commencing her journey. She started at her own thoughts and resolutely put them from her. She brought the image of Paulina before her; she revolved her courage and constancy; and took the example home to her own bosom. She ruminated upon the nature of her father's attack, and exhausted herself in longings to arrive at his bedside.

She roused herself, and looked forth. The scene was cheerless enough.

They were approaching the banks of a river; it was frozen over; and when the driver stopped to enquire of the princess, whether her highness chose to go round by the bridge, or venture over the ice, she exclaimed:—"Go straight across! No going round! The shortest, nearest way, by all means."

The rapidity of the stream, in ordinary weather, together with its sudden and recent freezing, caused the surface to be much broken up into inequalities, and large irregular lumps; and the man added something of the "roughness of the road." But Hermione rejoined:—"No matter! 'Twill save a good half hour! Cross the ice!"

The ice lay rugged, and uneven; here cracked, and split, in thin, crisp slabs; farther on, in small crumbled pieces; and,—where the current beneath set most strongly,—in huge blocks, and swelling, projecting masses. Towards the opposite bank, these impediments lay thickest; but the sledge had almost surmounted them, when it came suddenly in contact with a rough-jutting wedge, and was overturned. The shock unseated the driver; and the princess was thrown violently out. She was stunned by her fall; and lay among the blocks and splinters of ice, almost senseless.

She imagined that her senses had indeed left her, when she felt herself tenderly raised; and a voice that she knew but too well, called upon her name in agonized, passionate accents, beseeching her to speak if she yet lived.

"Leon! you here!" she faintly exclaimed, in the utmost amazement.

"The gods be praised!" was the deep-breathed response, as his eyes beheld hers unclose, and he heard the murmured

tone. "Speak no farther word—you will but exhaust yourself, beloved lady;" he added, as he saw her make another effort to speak. "I have the blest assurance of your safety,—no more need of words. Soft! I will bear you to the sledge; it is replaced, and ready to proceed. I know you are eager to be on your way again."

He lifted her in his arms, and placed her in the coach; but seeing that she sank languidly and feebly down; he said:—"You are not able to support yourself—I fear I must presume on my privilege of master, and beseech my pupil to let me sit beside her. I would not otherwise dare,—I would else have returned to my former seat,—I would not ask to enter your coach,—but you are still weak, and——"

His manner expressed such unfeigned reverence, and respectful distance, that the princess gently bowed her head, in token of consent.

Leon sprang into the sledge; and, signing to the driver to proceed, addressed himself to the assistance and revival of Hermione.

"By what miracle, came you to be there,—on the spot, to succour me?" she at length said. "I cannot yet comprehend how you, of all the world, should——"

She stopped; there was a tremulous emphasis on the word 'you,' that caused her to falter consciously; and that made Leon eagerly rejoin:—"Who but I should be there,—at hand—to help you, if need were? When I heard your sudden resolve,—to set forth to the capital alone, unattended,—I determined that you should have at least one faithful guardian by your side, in case of need. I hastened to the courtyard, where the sledge stood ready, and got the equerry, who occupied the seat in the rear, to yield me his place, on the plea that by the princess's orders, her preceptor was to attend her to Kief in his room."

"And you submitted to occupy the post of a lackey,—a menial,—for my sake! A scholar! A gentleman! You!"

"Thanked be the sacred gods, I was there, when the accident happened! No matter what seat in the sledge I occupied, so that I was with it!" he returned.

The sledge sped on. Evening was drawing in, as they entered a thick forest. It was wild and desolate; with scattered pine-trees, and dark, spiring firs. The driver knew the track perfectly, so there was no impediment to their swift progress; but the air was cold and bleak; the sky was leaden and dreary; the pendant snow and icicles upon branch and bough, looked dripping, drooping, and cheerless, and added to the cutting sharpness of the frozen atmosphere. As the blast swept by, keen and piercing, Leon drew the fur mantle more closely round his charge, endeavouring effectually to screen her.

The wind howled dismally and fiercely. During one of its wildest gusts, Leon thought he perceived Hèrmione shiver.

"You tremble—you are chilled,—this open sledge ill shelters you;" he said.

"I am warm,—quite warm;" she replied. But her face grew paler as she spoke. There was a look of secret horror in her eyes; and her lip blanched, though she held it firm from quivering.

"You are alarmed,—you dread something,—what have you to fear?" he urged.

Hermione seemed striving to master her terror, ere she trusted herself with another word. At that moment, a louder, fiercer, wilder howl than before, came upon the blast. And then, through the rush and roar of the air, Leon heard the dismayed voice of the driver, shouting:—"The wolves! The wolves are upon us!"

An instant after, he saw something dart across the track,—dark, shadowy, gaunt; then another, and another; presently, two and three together, and then five or six. He could discern the shape of the rough, coarse-haired creatures; he could see their lank, famine-starved sides, their pointed muzzles, their small, ferocious eyes. He could see them savage, and sinister,—now leaping forward, now bounding among the bushes and low trees, now gathering thicker and thicker, and faster and faster,—until a huge drove of them had collected, and maintained a rapid race, as if in steady pursuit of their hoped-for prey. They looked like some spectral pack of hounds, galloping on with sharp yells and growls, mingled with prolonged howling cries,—ravenous, fierce, unrelenting.

This appalling sight, the sense of imminent danger, the chance of becoming the victim of these fanged devils, only seemed to nerve the heart of Leon into sterner courage, and excite him into braver resolve. He held Hermione, firmly sustained, with one arm; whispered encouragement and inspiriting words to her; and called to the man to drive swiftly and boldly on, as their best chance of safety. "We may keep them yet at bay!" he shouted. "They cannot outstrip us, while we keep this pace! Do thy best, good fellow! Thine own and thy mistress's life are in thy hands! Spare not speed! On! on!"

He turned to Hermione. She had conquered her first overwhelming fears. She was herself in her self-control, her noble firmness, her high-souled dignity. He looked at her beautiful face,—elevated as it was with an expression fine, and intense, beyond all usual beauty.

"You look radiant,—as though you exulted, not feared!" he said.

"I do exult. I shall never live to be queen of Sicily! I die, as I could wish!" was her answer.

In her words, in her eyes, was the confession that it was because with him she should die, she rejoiced. Leon's emotion grew into a strange delirious kind of rapture. He took no farther heed of the howling, raging, ever-approaching fiends. He had fixed his eyes upon that marble-pale face, that he might look upon it to the last; when, suddenly, a piercing cry from the driver struck upon his ear.

"A light! A light!" it cried. "They are coming! We are saved!"

In effect, a large troup of horsemen, bearing torches, and accompanying a travelling sledge, might be perceived in motion towards them, among the trees. The light, the noise, the approach, scared away the wolves, who fled precipitately. In a few moments more, the cavalcade came up; and the rescuing company proved to be the lady Paulina and her retinue, come to meet that of the princess, on its progress to Kief.

Leon lost no time in committing the princess to the care of her friend, that immediate means might be taken for her recovery

from the fainting-fit in which she now lay. Hermione,—like many women who suppress their feelings, forbidding them the usual vent of tears and sobs;—was subject to swoon away, upon a strong, overpowering emotion. Hitherto, her young life had known few such fearful extremities; but now, the anxiety concerning her father, the agitation of her newly-discovered passion for Leon, the consciousness of its variance with the ties already formed for her duty, together with the terror of the recent scene, combined to throw her into the deep swoon, from which she was with difficulty restored.

When Paulina had at length succeeded in bringing her to herself, she told her, that knowing her filial solicitude would be awakened by the news of the emperor's attack, and finding that report greatly exaggerated its severity, she determined to set out as soon as possible after the courier to Igorhof, that she might soften the tidings she feared he would bring; and thus, not only allay the princess's immediate anxiety, but be ready to accompany her back to Kief, when she should repair thither to attend her father.

While the two ladies journeyed forward together, Leon followed in the other sledge, alone, wrapped in his thoughts. The whole seemed a vision, a vanished dream. Had she indeed been there, close within his arms, held against his heart? Had those fierce-mawed deaths really raced side-by-side with them, threatening immediate doom? Had he in fact swept through that wild forest, pierced by the night air, while, fast clasped in his embrace, she, with him, rushed to meet impending destruction? It seemed a wondrous, impossible fable; something that he had read or heard of,—ages ago, in some remote country; not that which had happened even here,—scarce two hours since,—to himself. But beneath all this vague, insubstantial, though vivid dream, there lay one blest piece of certainty. Those words she had uttered, in the crisis of their menaced fate,—nothing could deprive him of those. Like a secret treasure, he could hug them, hoard them, possess them. They sat beside him in the dark, empty sledge; they travelled with him to the end of his solitary journey, and made him feel no lack of companionship. "On my arrival, I shall see her,

and draw from her their sweet import!" was his constant thought.

But when he had reached Kief, when, upon his requesting an interview with the princess Hermione, he found himself shown into a state apartment, and bidden to wait until her highness's farther pleasure should be known as to his reception, he felt jealously alive to the fear, that if she could observe this ceremonial delay in receiving the man who shared with her the perils of that night, he must be mistaken in supposing she had ever entertained a thought of tender regard towards him.

Little did he think,—as he paced there, racking himself with jealous fears, and restlessly awaiting her coming—that her delay was owing to her own want of courage at the approaching interview.

But at length, schooling herself to firmness, by all her most imperative considerations of honour and duty, she appeared. Her aspect was serene, gracious, gentle.

She advanced to where Leon stood, gave him her hand with kindness, and said :—"My grateful thanks to him whose courage and devotion enabled me to carry through my wish of coming to my father without delay! You will rejoice to learn that he is now out of danger,—all but quite restored."

Leon bowed upon the hand he raised to his lips, unable to utter more than a murmured gratulation.

"The emperor's first care, when able to receive his loyal friends," she went on, "will be to join the expression of his gratitude to that of his child. He bids me acknowledge his obligation to the man, whose intellectual resources, inestimably dedicated to her advantage, are equalled by a bravery and intrepidity which risked life for her protection."

"The gods vouchsafe but seldom such blest chance;" he continued. "Still, once to have owed to them the accident of your rescue, together with the memory of those words,—words extorted by the terrors of that night, yet words so priceless in their gentle significance,——"

"Let them be forgotten!" said the voice of Hermione, vainly striving to steady its tremulous sadness, as she interrupted Leon's eager speech.

"They are treasured in my heart—never to be driven thence—never to be effaced!" he said, impetuously.

"Then hold them buried there!" she said firmly. "I will neither deny them nor retract them. I will rather consign them to your keeping,—to your honour. They were rashly, weakly uttered—in the face of death itself,—when I believed that life and I had done with each other,—I was free to rejoice at my enfranchisement. But I was restored to life; and, with it, to life's demands upon my faith and truth. I abide by them; and I ask you, my tutor, my guardian, my friend, to aid me in mine intent."

She stood with such a majesty of virtuous determination, that Leon, no longer able to contain his transport, cast his arm about her, and drew her towards him, as he whispered:—"And what if faith and truth were not opposed to freedom? What if tenderness for Leon, plight to Leontes, were one? What if Leon himself, and Leontes were one?"

Hermione, in utter wonderment, gazed at him; withdrawing from his arm, and raising herself to full height of erect and dignified posture. Never had she looked so cold, so marble still, so statue-like in her lofty quietude.

The prince threw himself at her feet with a diffidence, a humility—unknown to him in his character of secretary.

"The prince of Sicily! Leontes!" she at length exclaimed. "Your highness wrongs yourself by this attitude. Rise, my lord!" She spoke with a haughty condescension, which she had never observed towards the poor student. "You wrong your greatness by this lowly posture, no less than by the disguise, the deception, with which it pleased you first to approach me."

Leon stung by her manner, started from his knee, echoing the word, "Deception!"

"Was it not a deception, my lord? One that might have compromised her who was to be your wife? One unworthy yourself and me? Yet can I better forgive that than my own weakness." And she turned from him, as if proudly abashed.

"Let us exchange forgiveness;" he said. "Hermione shall forgive me, that I ventured hither to behold with mine own eyes

the truth of those virtues and beauties which fame extolled as so surpassing; and I will forgive her that she should own to a softness of heart, which in my mind, but adds another charm to her character."

"Nay, my lord, since you are resolved to throw off austerity with your character of preceptor, and commence suitor, by flattering my errors, I will abate no jot of my rightful courtship. Since your grace hath honoured me by the compliment of coming so far, to play the wooer yourself instead of by proxy, I mean to enjoy all the glory of so princely a suitor; and shall hope to bid your highness welcome in your own proper person, among my company this evening."

She curtsied with gay graciousness, and withdrew; leaving Leontes perplexed, fascinated, chagrined, pleased, provoked, charmed, dissatisfied—all at once; yet more enamoured than ever.

This playful manner she maintained towards him. With livelier grace than she had ever before deported herself, she enacted the courted beauty, and behaved to the prince as to her admitted admirer.

Weeks crept by; and weeks merged into months; until three had passed, since things had gone thus between Hermione and Leontes. He had sent her a few rare flowers; accompanied by some verses.

"See here, my father!" she said, appealing to him, "see what my lord the prince hath set down, of my being 'unequalled in worth as in beauty;' and I know not what else of impossible fictions, permitted only to poets and lovers—the licensed falsehoodmongers of all time."

"Thou art ungrateful, child; and like a spoiled beauty, know'st not how, properly, to estimate the homage of love and poesy. But I leave thee to thank this poetical lover of thine as he should be thanked; and that is, by promising him an early day for the betrothal which has been too long delayed. Sue her, prince; thou hast her father's sanction for a little pressing."

And the emperor good-humouredly left the lovers to themselves.

It was the first time Leontes had found himself alone with

Hermione since the interview in which he had avowed his identity. For an instant he hesitated, overpowered by mingled sensations of joy, hurt feeling, eagerness, hope, bitterness, dread, delight. He hurried towards her; and poured out imploring words that she would yield to her father's wishes, and crown his own.

Hermione tried to recall some of her playful ease; but her voice faltered, as she replied. "I am ready to fulfil my father's will—to redeem his pledged word."

"I will not claim you upon that contract;" he answered, impetuously; "the cold fulfilment of a vow cannot content me. Give me such bounty of love as I used to dream I read in your eyes for the poor secretary. If you cannot grant me the assurance that I am dear to you for mine own sake, I shall return to Sicily —content with my regrets as I best may—and—leave you free."

"You cannot do that, my lord."

Her altered voice—altered from the light ease it had endeavoured to assume, to a low tone, serious, and tender—made him start and look into her eyes. They met his for a moment with their own sweet composure; then fell, as she went on, in reply to his eager look:—"You cannot do that; I am no longer free."

"Hermione!"

"No; for I——" she let the white hand he had seized, clasp palms with his—"for I——'*I am yours for ever.*'"

He held her to him. "With full love mine? I am greedy of assurance."

"With full love. I could have died with Leon; I would live till death with Leontes."

He folded her to his satisfied heart.

And now the preparations for the public ceremonial of solemn betrothal went forward in good earnest. Meantime, the lovers passed their time together, with unclouded joy.

When the time came for Leontes and Hermione to set forth for Sicily, they were attended by a numerous train of friends and followers; among whom were not only the lord Antigonus, and

his wife and child, but the lady Emilia. Alexis had fallen in his very first campaign; and the young widow, without a tie to bind her to her native country, followed her royal mistress to her new home.

This grief, and the parting with her father, were the only shadows upon the happiness of Hermione, when she prepared to accompany her betrothed husband to the land of his birth.

Immediately on their arrival, the marriage was celebrated. The whole island rang with rejoicing and festivity; and all Sicily joined their king, in his delight to see his son wedded to a princess whom he found as charming as fame had represented her.

This was the final satisfaction of the good old man's life; for full of years and honour the king died, leaving Leontes to succeed him.

Time went on, and hopes were entertained of an heir to the crown of Sicily. The joyful tidings were sent to Russia; but before the birth of his grand-child was announced, the emperor had expired.

The news of her father's death brought mourning to the hearts of Hermione and Leontes; and they were still in the bitterness of their grief when their boy was born. They could not have had a sweeter source of comfort and consolation, than the little Mamillius. He was a gentle-tempered fondling child, with a fund of quiet spirits and imaginative fancy.

Paulina was dotingly fond of the little prince; and would often beg him of his mother, that he might come to spend a day with herself and her children at a quiet country house she had, somewhat removed from the court.

It was a retreat fitted up, by the indulgence of her husband, perfectly in her own taste. Paulina was a woman of an earnest nature. She was devout; and she had an intense love of art. These two paramount feelings were combinedly consulted by the manner in which this retired spot was adorned. There were usual sitting-rooms; but adjoining them was a gallery filled with treasures of art—pictures, sculpture, and many curiosities in gems and medals. At the end of this gallery, was a chapel built entirely of white marble, lighted from the ceiling, and contain-

ing a curtained recess, intended for a group of statuary, whenever Paulina should have met with one of sufficient merit to occupy this particular niche. To this gallery and chapel, Paulina would often lead the young Mamillius, and her own girls, pleased with the entertainment of the children who crowded round her as she explained to them some of the beauties and curious valuables of the gallery, or some of the glory and mysteries belonging to the chapel. In this latter spot, the little prince delighted to linger; his eyes fastened upon her lips, as, with earnest words, she spoke of sacred themes in terms she thought best suited to his childish comprehension.

Once as he stood there grasping her right hand, and nestling close at her side, and looking earnestly at the curtained recess, opposite to which they had paused—Paulina thought she felt the boy tremble. She asked him if he feared or ailed anything.

"No, I am not afraid—I feel very well—very happy."

"Do you see anything?" she added.

"I thought I saw the curtain move. I was thinking, if the folds were suddenly to draw back, and show us a grand, gracious form standing there. It would be beautiful, would it not?"

"Yes; but there is nothing there. I will show you there is nothing." And Paulina would have advanced to draw back the drapery, when the boy exclaimed:—"Don't think that I am afraid! I will go to it myself! I'll pull it back myself. Only while it's undrawn, I can fancy that it moves; and believe that perhaps there's something beautiful standing there, behind it."

Leontes had often spoken with enthusiasm to his wife of his dear friend and brother-in-affection, Polixenes. He, like himself, had lately succeeded to his father's throne, and was now king of Bohemia. At length, after many a pressing entreaty and invitation on the part of the king of Sicily, his friend Polixenes consented to come and spend some time with him, on the express condition that on the following summer Leontes should return his visit, and make some stay in Bohemia.

For some time before his friend's arrival, Leontes could speak to Hermione of nothing else; and she, with her usual cordial

sympathy in all that interested him, evinced as anxious a desire to see this dear brother-in-love of her husband's, as her husband himself. From the same cause—after Polixenes had landed, and had been their guest some time, and had lengthened, and yet again prolonged his visit, at the instance of his friend—Hermione would play the kind and affectionate hostess, with no less earnestness, than her husband played the part of host. At last, Polixenes withstood all farther solicitations of his kind entertainers, by fixing a certain day for his departure—the morrow, the very morrow, of the one on which Leontes again pressed him to remain, and called upon Hermione to second his entreaty; when she playfully replied:—

"*I had thought, sir, to have held my peace, until you had drawn oaths from him, not to stay.*"

WINTER'S TALE, Act i. Sc. 2.



TALE XIV.

VIOLA; THE TWIN.

ON the Eastern shores of the Adriatic, is a place called Messaline. It will not be found in the map. But we have great (poetical,—not geographical) authority for its being there—somewhere on those shores—not far down beyond the coast of Illyria. It is,—or rather was,—a fine stately place; with noble shipping, and handsome buildings. It had a goodly harbour, and commanded a grand expansive view of the broad, blue, sparkling sea. Its inhabitants were of Greek origin, and maintained many of their Grecian peculiarities of custom, speech, and dress; although they had become much Italianized by their vicinity and association with their neighbours on the opposite shores of Italy. There were many beautiful islands clustered close about; fertile, luxuriant green spots, embosomed in the glittering azure of the waters; looking like portions of the shore, parted in some giant freak of Nature's, from the parent land, which wound in deep undulating indentations, forming lovely bays, and sheltered recesses, along the edge of the sea.

In this Messaline, dwelt a young merchant, named Sebastian. He had been absent now, more than twenty months; and from the time he had left its port, no tidings had reached him from Messaline. As Sebastian neared his native shores, on his return up the Adriatic, his heart sickened with impatience to behold his home, his wife, and as he hoped—his child; but stress of weather compelled him to put into harbour, at one

of the islands that lay scattered in his course. He remembered, when he landed, that in this island, on her own estate, resided a certain maiden aunt of his,—an old lady, very precise in her notions, very demure in her manners, and very particular in all her ways. She had a pale, faded face; a pinched, wiry figure; thin, transparent hands, with their veins very prominent; and a dabby voice, with which she dab—dab—dabbed on, in a perpetual, everflowing, complacent tattle.

But she had been very kind to Sebastian when a boy (she owned to a strong partiality for boys), and he resolved therefore to pay a visit to this maiden aunt, now he was so near her demesne.

He was shown into the large plainly-furnished apartment; in which, at one end, he found her sitting, with one or two of her woman attendants, spinning.

When he had announced himself, the old lady extended her slender fingers to him in an affable kind of flurry, and said:—"Dear me! Well! And so it's you, Sebastian! Well! Dear me! Only think! How you've grown! Dear me! Ay, you're married, since, I recollect. Dear me! it seems impossible! Only think; married! Well, well! I declare it quite flutters me, to think of it, and to see you! Dear me! Who should have thought of seeing you enter the room, of all beings in the world? Ay, well, yes; strange things do happen! Dear me! I had a visit a day or two since—a visitation, I may say, —Dear me, well!—a visit from your uncle,—you remember your uncle, don Ignazio? Well, ay, he, who but he, should make his appearance here!" The old lady gasped, and played her fan so impressively, and fluttered so perceptibly; and taking her kerchief from her lips, laid it on her heart, so pantingly, that Sebastian felt called upon to echo:—"Dear me!"

"Yes, indeed! Well! He, and none but he, I'll assure you! He came, he said, to spend a few days with me. Why, you see,—dear me,—well,—it's difficult to—it's awkward to know how to—dear me! How shall I——? Yet you're an old married man, quite a steady old married man,—yes,—dear me,—to be sure, well, there can be no hesitation, with an old married man like you, in——"

Her dab—dab—dabby voice had quavered off, and came to a full stop.

Sebastian looked at her; more at a loss than ever.

The maiden lady caught up her handkerchief, hemmed; laid it down, and took up her fan; fanned herself; then waved it towards the door, saying to her women:—"There can be no harm,—no impropriety;—you may go, girls; well, yes, you may,—yes, you had better, go."

Seeing that none of her women could boast fewer years than herself, the title by which she had addressed them seemed something misapplied; but she had so long been accustomed to use it, that she never dreamed of its absurdity.

"You must know, my dear good nephew, I am very particular,—dear me,—very much so—and very properly too,—yes,—very particular in having my maids in the room with me, when I have company. But I will consider you, my dear boy—ahem—my excellent nephew—as a friend—quite as a confidential friend, I may say. Ahem—your character as a married man—and—a—a father of a family,—by-the-bye, any family?"

Sebastian contrived to insinuate a word to the effect that he hoped to find himself a father on his return; that he had been long absent from home; that he had received no tidings since his departure; but that when he had left Messaline there was a prospect of his becoming long ere this, a family man.

"Dear me! ah! well! That's a comfort! A perfectly respectable character! In virtue of which, my worthy nephew, I may confide to you,—ahem—that this visit of your uncle Ignazio's very much perplexes me—in fact, distresses me. He bears a character that,—a character which—well, dear me,—a character, in short, the very reverse of correct. He is quite an unfit visitor for a lone maiden lady—a lady of nice conduct—of delicate notions—as, I may say,—dear me, I hope, without vanity,—I am."

She fanned here with such solemn, dignified wafts of her broad green fan, that it created wind enough to lift the hair from her nephew's temples, and give him the aghast look which her communication demanded.

The next moment, a stout, short, ruddy-cheeked, ruby-nosed, scarlet-lipped, red-throated, crimson-eared, little gentleman came bustling into the room, ran up to Sebastian, hugged him, and exclaimed:—"My dear fellow, my dear nephew, glad to see you! Corpo di Diana! glad to see you! I heard the news, down below there, on the sea-shore, that your vessel had put in here, in the gale, last night! Corpo di santissima Diana! Delighted to see you, my dear fellow!"

Sebastian returned the old gentleman's warm greeting.

"And so you're married, my dear fellow!" continued the brisk little gentleman; "Corpo di Diana, give you joy! Never had the good fortune to get married, myself! But I'm quite ready to give everybody else joy, who's so fortunate as to get a wife. Corpo di Diana! Nothing like woman, lovely woman, for making home happy!"

"Now, cousin Ignazio, if you are going to broach any of your improper sentiments,—dear me,—I must really——" said lady Annuccia, rising, as if about to leave the room.

"My dear madam, pray sit still. Corpo di Diana! You needn't be alarmed. I was merely congratulating my nephew —our nephew, here, upon his marriage. Any little folks, eh?" he continued, turning to the young merchant, with a facetious poke in the ribs.

Sebastian smilingly explained his domestic prospects; adding, that it was rather late, he feared, to ask them, otherwise he would have requested his aunt and uncle to stand godfather and godmother to his child.

"My good nephew," said lady Annuccia, "it has always been a wish of mine, you must know, to be godmother,—since it is not likely——well, dear me,—never mind,—but I have always had a longing, I say, to be godmother to a boy. I confess to a liking, an affection for boys—I own my fondness, my doting for boys,—a partiality, a predilection, a preference,—I may say, a perfect mania for boys. I ought perhaps to blush to avow such a weakness, but I do own I'm fond of boys. Boys are my passion! Now, my dear nephew, for all it is too late to be godmother to your child, if you should find on your return home, that a boy has been born to you, I promise to give him a gold

mug, richly chased; and moreover, will set him down in my will for something handsome."

"A boy? Pshaw!" exclaimed don Ignazio. "A girl for my money! give me girls, *I* say!"

"Now really, cousin Ignazio, I must request,—I must insist——" said lady Annuccia; "if you are going to make any of your unpleasant remarks, your free speeches,—I shall be compelled, however unwillingly, to retire."

"Bless the woman! I'm not saying anything wrong, am I? I'm only saying that girls are my delight, my passion! Corpo di santissima Diana! I've a right to say that, I suppose? I'll tell you what, nephew;" he added; "if you find, when you get home, that you have a little girl, I'll give the pretty moppet just such another gold goblet, as my lady here has promised your child, if it should be a boy. If it's a son, she's welcome to him; if it's a daughter, I'll give her a dower, as if she were my own. Come, is it a bargain, my dear fellow?"

Sebastian expressed suitable acknowledgments to both aunt and uncle; saying, he hoped it would not be long before they each favoured him with a visit, to see the little creature in whom they had now an interest; and then, observing that the wind had changed, and the weather quite cleared, he took leave of lady Annuccia, saying he was anxious to lose no time in getting aboard, and taking advantage of the favourable homeward breeze.

It was evening,—late evening, when the young merchant's ship sailed into the harbour of Messaline. Sebastian left all to the care of his people, and hurried away. His house lay in one of the broad, handsome off-streets of the town. At the back of the house, overlooking the garden, there was a projecting balcony of white marble, with a flight of steps at one end. Over this balcony was stretched a sloping, striped awning, of bright stuff, to screen off the heat and glare of the sun from the windows. In the balcony sat a lady. As the fresher breeze of coming night slightly stirred the valanced edge of the awning above her head, the lady looked up, smilingly. On the marble ledge of the balcony stood a goblet of iced water; she dipped

one finger in the water, and held it, thus moistened, up into the air. "It blows from Venice!" he could hear her say. For Sebastian had stolen close beneath the balcony, knowing where he should probably find her. In another moment, he sprang up the balcony-steps, and had caught her to his heart.

"The child! Our child! Let me see it!" were among some of his earliest words.

His wife looked into his face; and then said:—"Come!" They stepped through the window that opened from the balcony, and entered a sleeping-room, where there were two little beds, side by side. She went towards one of them, and lifting the snow-white insect-net, disclosed within, nestled upon the pillow, a cherub face. Then turning, with the other hand she lifted the net of the second little bed; and there, close nestled, lay another angel face.

"Amazement! Two? The same! The one the counterpart of the other,—as if reflected in a mirror!" said the young husband in hushed wonder.

"Born both in one hour! Our twin boy and girl! Our twin-children!" answered his wife, with her glad eyes fixed on his.

"You greet me with riches, indeed, sweet wife, to match those I bring you! I return a wealthy man, in atonement for my long absence, to find my home treasures increased beyond all hope. Prosperous merchant! Happy Sebastian!"

Next morning came the delight of seeing the little ones, awake; of seeing their beauty; above all, of noting their wondrous and complete resemblance. Their native costume admitted of this similarity, even between a boy's and girl's garb; for the dress of a female differed but little from that worn by the men. It consisted of a snowy tunic, or short, ample shirt, gathered in close-set folds, from the waist, which was girt with a rich sash; a loose jacket, thickly embroidered, with sleeves open from the wrist to the elbow, showing beneath the full white sleeves of the shirt, which closed in plaits upon the bosom to the throat. The limbs were cased in shapely leggings, or greaves, of the same colour and fabrics with the jacket; and like it, embroidered, either in gold, silver, or silken braid. Upon the head, set amid the clusters of hair,—for it was not

large enough to cover much space,—was worn a cap of correspondent texture and hue with the jacket, or vest; either fastened by a pendant jewel, or gemmed clasp, or ornamented with a long thick tassel of gold, silver, or silk, according to the material of the embroidery.

It was in a suit of this kind, that the two little creatures made their appearance before their father, the morning after his return. He could not cease from admiring,—as much at their extreme loveliness, as at their singular likeness. He could do nothing but praise them, fondle them, use them like toys,—like playthings; so pretty, so curious, so odd, so amusing, they seemed to him. They were a merry party, the father still playing tricks with them, the mother looking smilingly on, the children joining in the frolic, and enchanted with their new companion,—when don Ignazio was announced.

Sebastian had but just time to whisper his wife that she should say nothing about the children, whatever she might hear remarked; when in bustled the old gentleman.

"My dear fellow! Glad to see you! Knew you'd be glad to see me, so came straight here. I don't know how it happened, exactly, but it seems I gave some unpardonable offence to cousin Annuccia. Worthy woman, but sickeningly nice! And, santissima Diana! so sinfully skinny!—Well, my dear fellow, and so you're cosily nestled at home? Soft bosomed in domestic joys, eh? Charming wife, lovely babe,—ah, how's this, two? Or, egad, is it one cut in half?"

"Twins, my dear sir;" said the smiling Sebastian.

"Twins, eh? Corpo di Diana! What little beauties! The havoc they'll make among the men, by-and-by, eh? By the way, I owe you two golden cups, and two dowries, since you've two daughters! Corpo di Diana! What two-fold beauty! What double loveliness!"

The brisk little gentleman, soon after, took a bustling leave; declaring he had some visits to pay to some old acquaintances in the town, whom he would not miss seeing before he left Messaline.

Not long after the uncle departed, the aunt arrived. Lady Annuccia came in great pomp; having sailed from her island

estate in her own barge, and being attended by a numerous train of servants, male and female.

"Dear me, well,—and so that is your young wife, my dear boy,—my worthy nephew? Dear me! And where is your little one? Dear me, I shall be delighted to see it, of course, I'm sure. I hope it's a boy!"

"You do not know, aunt Annuccia, that a double happiness awaited me on my return home;" said Sebastian. "I found twins born to me."

"Twins! Dear me,—well,—it quite flutters me to hear it—to think of it;—well, dear me. Is it possible! Twins! I shouldn't have thought it! Dear me, well! Indeed! I should never have thought of such a thing."

"My love," said Sebastian, to his wife, "will you bring the little ones hither?"

The old lady sat, lost in admiration, gazing from one to the other. At length she exclaimed:—"Dear little fellows! I never beheld two such loves! Absolute cupids! Only—dear me—well, it's a shame to make such a comparison—so beautifully dressed as these two darlings are—while cupids,—well, dear me,—never mind! But was there ever such a perfect pair! They're certainly the most lovely boys I ever set eyes on! I shall be only too proud,—too happy, I'm sure, to send the gold mug I promised,—one a-piece,—to these beautiful little fellows. My dear good nephew,—my excellent young niece,—what a pride it must be to you, to be the parent of these two darling sons!"

"I own, we are not a little delighted with our pretty twins;" said Sebastian.

"Pretty! Dear me! They are handsome as angels! But you will excuse me, my dear children,—that is,—ahem,—my dear nephew and niece,—if I leave you so soon; but I have a commission to execute in the neighbourhood, I shall not be absent long. I will return forthwith—immediately."

The old maiden lady went straight to a goldsmith's close at hand. "I want two gold drinking-mugs, my good sir;" said she to the master of the shop; "they must be very handsome, —fit for a, dear me, well,—fit for a christening present."

She had scarcely thus announced her wish, when who should bustle into the shop but don Ignazio.

"Ah, cousin Annuccia Well met. I am come to order the golden mug I promised to our nephew's bantling. You've heard the news, I suppose. Corpo di Diana! Lucky dog! Twins! And as beautiful as Venus! You never saw such a couple of young charmers!"

"I have seen them, cousin: and it is that very errand brings me here,—the golden mug I promised. I shall make it a pair, of course."

"So you've given up your mania for boys, have you?" said don Ignazio. "Corpo di Diana! I honour your better taste."

"Not at all, cousin Ignazio; it is because I find our nephew has two such beautiful boys, that I——"

"Boys! Girls you mean!" exclaimed don Ignazio. "Two blooming girls!"

"Girls! Boys you mean!" echoed lady Annuccia.

"Don't tell me, my dear madam;" said the brisk old gentleman. "Corpo di Diana! I ought to understand something of these matters; I consider myself a judge of female beauty; and if ever I set eyes on two lovely girls,——"

"A truce with your libertine observations, sir!" said the maiden lady, with a wave of her fan sternly supercilious. "To show you how entirely *my* mind is made up on the point, I shall proceed with my purchase. Two gold mugs, if you please, my good sir;" continued she, turning to the goldsmith.

"Certainly, madam;" replied the goldsmith. "I think I have two articles lately sent me, that will just suit your ladyship's purpose. They are a pair of golden goblets of rare workmanship, by a renowned Florentine artist. The chasing is admirable; its design—the exploits of Castor and Pollux."

"Couldn't be more appropriate! Leda's twin *sons!*" exclaimed lady Annuccia, with a triumphant glance at don Ignazio. "Dear me! yes; of course! And though the story of their origin is not altogether what I,—well,—never mind. Since the chasing represents their adventures, not their mother's, why,—I think I may venture to decide upon them, as gifts

for my dear little boys;—that is,—not mine,—but, dear me, well,——"

"I understand, madam;" said the goldsmith. "But my dear sir;" he added, turning to don Ignazio; "if you want something very tasteful, and choice, to present to your two little friends, what think you of these newly invented articles from Piacenza? They are wrought in silver, and are very dainty and seemly, for eating with; quite a luxury. They are called forks. But just introduced. Only used at the tables of the first Italian nobility. Now, one of these forks, with a silver spoon to match, would make a very elegant gift."

"Be it so;" said don Ignazio. "Give me two of each, for my brace of infant Graces. Corpo di Diana. I may say Venuses."

"So you persist in speaking of them as girls?" said lady Annuccia, scornfully.

"Of course I do. As I said before, I ought to know something of girls, and——"

"Oh, doubtless, doubtless! But we won't trouble you for any repetition of your ribald remarks, if you please, cousin Ignazio. I shall take my gold mugs, and return at once to our nephew's; where we shall soon find who's right."

"We shall!" said don Ignazio confidently; as he attended her back to the merchant's house.

"We have brought your little ones our promised gifts, my dear fellow!" he exclaimed, as he entered the room, where Sebastian, his wife, and their two children, were together; the former, seated side by side, watching the latter, who were rolling and tumbling with one another, on the floor.

"Already!" exclaimed the young merchant. "They are unfairly won; you mustn't be beguiled of them by a trick. In jest, we allowed you to think, that you both had your wish. So you have, in some sort; I have luckily, a child to please each of your several fancies. Yours for a boy, my dear madam; yours for a girl, my dear sir. But there's only one a-piece. Come hither, children!" he added laughing.

"Who's this?" he said, gently pinching the cheek of the one who stood nearest.

"Viola; papa's little girl;" lisped the little creature.

"Then here is your pet, uncle Ignazio;" said the young merchant, passing her over to the old gentleman; who took her upon his knee, and began making acquaintance with her.

"And this?" continued the father.

"Sebastian, papa's namesake;" said the little fellow.

"Then here is your favourite, my dear aunt;" said the merchant; leading his little son towards her. As the maiden lady seated the young boy on her lap, and gave him the glittering present she had brought for him, and smoothed the fair locks,—scarcely less bright and golden than her gift, she said: —"Well, dear me! I don't know but it's happiest as it is. I shouldn't have known which to love best! And now, I'm quite sure,—of course,—dear me,—of course, I like this one best! I'm so fond of boys! I have an affection for boys, I own! I ought perhaps,—to feel a delicacy in confessing such a preference,—but,—I avow it—I am passionately fond of boys!"

"My dear madam, on the contrary, it does you honour!" said don Ignazio. "Corpo di Diana! your liking for boys, is the best point about you!"

"Now, cousin Ignazio,—I beg,—instead of making such personal, and particular allusions,—dear me, well,—you will oblige me by giving to your little favourite, this other golden cup, like her brother's; and if you please, you may hand me over your duplicate gift, and I will present it, in your name to mine,—ahem—well, dear me,—to him."

Some very happy time was spent by our young merchant, at this period, in his own home. He would sit with his wife, when evening brought in cool repose, after the daily fatigues, and anxieties of business, watching their children from the balcony, as they gambolled in the garden. Their father still found the same diverting perplexity, in trying to know them apart; but the mother's instincts were more unerring. She never failed. Sometimes he would affect to disbelieve her, and appeal to the child itself; but the laughing answer always came in accordance with what she had said:—"Mamma guessed; I'm Viola, papa;" or:—"Mamma's right; it's Sebastian, papa."

His wife at last declared he had best tie something about the

neck of one of the children, that he might at once distinguish it from its twin brother or sister.

The merchant agreed; and that evening, when his little Viola came to wish him good-night, he fastened a string of coral round her throat.

The child was pleased with the gawd; but it could not make her forget or omit, a certain little ceremonial which always took place between her father and herself, every night, before she went to bed.

This was, to climb up from the balcony-seat by his side, saying:—"I must bid good night to my mole! Viola can't sleep, if she don't kiss her mole, and say 'Felice notte,' to it." Then she would stand on tip-toe beside him; and her father would bend down his forehead; and she would put back the locks of hair from his white, polished temple; and precisely on one particular spot, she would press her lips against his brow, where lurked a small brown mole; saying a thousand, murmured, fondling words to it.

This was the little Viola's delight; just one of those sportive fancies, those whimsies of affection, in which a parent indulges a caressing, gentle-natured child; slight as threads of gossamer, yet subtly potent as the magnet-link.

In after years, when sailing on the lonely sea, far from home, a wanderer in search of wealth to store for his children, the merchant, thinking of his fanciful baby caress, would find his eyes moisten and his heart swell with an emotion that many a graver thought would fail to excite.

And in yet other subsequent years, Viola, recalling the image of her father, found no point more vivid, than this same little mole upon his brow.

Too soon, alas, was the young merchant's happiness blighted by the death of his gentle wife. Distracted by his loss, he resolved to travel as the readiest means of escaping from sorrow. He left his children in the care of a certain Marcella, a woman of whom he had heard a good character.

"Adieu, my little Viola; what shall I fetch from beyond the sea for thee? From the grand, brave cities across the sea, where there are stores of gay things, to bring home!"

"For me, papa? Why, bring me that nice boy, the little duke Orsino you were telling of, one evening, that would make such a good play-fellow for Sebastian and me. You said he was 'a noble lad.' I should like to have him here with us."

"And what shall I bring home for my Sebastian?" he said.

"My mother;" answered the boy, in a low voice. "They took her away—she is gone. Bring her back; bring her home. I want to see her. I want her with us again."

The father turned away.

"Papa!" said Viola, "I want to say good-bye to my mole. Lift me up, that I may kiss it and tell it I shall think of it every night when I go to bed, and send a hundred times 'felicissima notte' after it!"

He took her up in his arms and hugged her to the heart that had so much ado to hide its anguish. Then, with another embrace to her little brother, he tore himself away.

The sum that Marcella received from the merchant, for the maintenance of his children, so far from being applied to increase the comforts of the household, was devoted to increase the small hoard which had slowly accumulated beneath this excellent contriver's care.

The elegant home in which this young boy and girl had been reared, caused the niggardly appointments of the one to which they were now removed, to be a source of constant misery to them, and gave rise to perpetual offence on the part of its mistress. She thought them dainty, whimsical, fastidious; whereas, they were only accustomed to refinement and indulgence, and severely felt their loss.

When she scolded them for veriest trifles, and punished them for merest childish scrapes, she thought herself most worthily fulfilling the charge she had undertaken.

Little Viola was a timid child; she had been accustomed to much petting from her father. Upon her, therefore, the harsh-toned reproofs, and strict penances of monna Marcella, produced a strong effect. She slunk about as if in constant dread of being chidden, or punished, for some offence she might have unconsciously committed.

"What makes you look so scared, Viola mia?" said her brother, coming in, one evening, and finding her with trembling lips, and tears in her eyes. "Has monna Marcella been finding fault with you again?"

"Oh yes! And I don't know what for—I didn't mean to do wrong; but she's very angry; and says that if I offend her again, she'll lock me up in the yard."

"Well, if she does never mind!" said Sebastian. "We play there every day, you know. What does it signify whether the door's locked or not?"

"Oh, I don't mind being there with you. But she'll lock me there alone; and I'm afraid of that big, snarling dog by myself. He jumps to the end of his chain, and makes at me, and comes so close; oh, much closer—at least it seems so—than when you're by to take care of me."

At length the impending evil came.

It was a saint's-day, and the twins were beguiling the seemingly interminable afternoon by a game of play together in the little stony yard at the back of the house—keeping at a respectfully safe distance from Lupo—while monna Marcella was helping the servant girl to wash up the utensils that had served at the noon-tide meal. Presently the careful housewife missed the children's gold drinking-mugs, and their silver spoons and forks; which, in virtue of its being a festa-day, they had been permitted to use.

"How's this, Menicuccia?" said monna Marcella, with more than usual asperity. "How's this? I don't see the plate. It was had out to-day, to please those whimsical brats! Where is it? Santa Rosa! How the wench stands! Where in the name of all the saints is it, girl?"

"I haven't put it nowhere, ma'am;" answered Menicuccia, in trepidation. "I an't so much as touched it. Santa Madonna di Loretto forbid!—I see the twins take the cups and things out with 'em into the yard to play with."

"You did!" screamed monna Marcella. "Well, this beats all! They must make play-things of their property, must they! and such valuables as those, for toys! It's enough to make the hair of all the 'Beati' in Paradise stand on end, to think of such tricks!"

Monna Marcella hastened to the scene of these reckless proceedings—not the crinose feats, but the tricks; not paradise, but the stony back-yard.

She found the children busily employed, raking up the pebbles and dust, filling the gold cups to the brim, and preparing to make dirt-pies, by the addition of water from the dog's pan, which Sebastian was adventurously bringing by spoonfuls at a time, from under Lupo's very nose.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed monna Marcella, in a tone likest to a peacock's cry before rain. "Pretty doings, truly! Who began this? Who set the example? But I said I'd match you, and I will! I'll punish you *both* this time; and then there can be no mistake. You shall both be locked up."

"I shan't mind that; we shan't mind being locked up together;" said Viola, suddenly relieved.

"I know who says that! It must be that coward of a *girl!*" said monna Marcella. "But no, child; I mean no such thing. You shall both be locked up; but separately—in your separate rooms; while I go to spend the evening at messer Gervasio's 'campagna.'"

It is possible that even this 'good manager' might have shrunk from inflicting so much of what she thought salutary misery, could she have guessed its amount. As it was, she was struck with its effects, when she returned home. She went at once up to Viola's room and found the child lying upon the bed. Its bright hair was in disorder; its cheeks very pale; its eyelids swollen and stained with tears, while the lips lay parted, and almost colourless.

It was not at all in such a woman's system of management, to speak to the child the next morning soothingly, with respect to the future. Therefore little Viola had no idea that there was anything softened in the state of affairs between herself and the harsh-visaged personage, who sat watching her and her brother next morning, as they took their breakfast meal beneath her eye.

"What ails ye, child? What's amiss? Why don't you eat your polenta, and drink your milk?"

"I'm not hungry, thank you," said Viola.

"Not hungry? nonsense, child! Eat your victuals, when they're set before you. Nice fresh polenta of chestnuts! And milk! Sweet milk! Come, drink it off, there's a good child."

Viola obediently put the cup to her lips; but set it down again, with an incapable look, and a deprecating glance towards monna Marcella.

"You make it seem like medicine to her, monna Marcella, by saying 'drink it off;'" said Sebastian.

"Obstinate, perverse little toad!" exclaimed monna Marcella. "But I'll tell you what; I'm going to market, and if I find, on my return, you've been a good child, and have drunk up your milk, I'll give you a lump of sugar. There now! Won't that be nice?"

When monna Marcella was gone, Viola said, "I don't mean to be obstinate, but I can't eat or drink; I feel as if it would choke me, every time I try."

"Then don't try," said Sebastian. "Why should you?"

"Oh, she'll be so angry if she comes back, and finds it not gone! She'll think me perverse; and perhaps stand over me, and make me take it. And I can't; indeed I can't."

"Then you shan't," said Sebastian stoutly. "Here, give it me."

He snatched up the trencher of polenta, and the mug of milk; hurried out with them to the yard, and flung them to Lupo, who licked them up in a trice of grateful gobble.

"What a good thought!" exclaimed Viola, with a sigh of relief, as her brother returned.

"But you're not well, Viola mia;" said the boy, as he saw how white her cheeks and lips were.

"I feel stifled," said she. "I wish I could have some sweet, fresh, open air; I wish we could have one of those pleasant walks, down by the sea-shore, that we used to take long ago, when we lived at our happy home."

"Let's go!" said Sebastian. "I'm sure I could find the way. Let's go, Viola!"

Viola joyfully gave him her hand, and the two children left the house together.

The sun's rays beat down hot and scorching, and were re-

flected by the rough white stones beneath their feet; but the two little ones trudged merrily on, hand-in-hand, looking up at the silvery olive-boughs, which overhung the walls, and at the glorious blue sky above.

"How bright and beautiful all looks now again!" said Viola in a happy voice to her brother. "I'm so glad we came; it has made me feel quite well,—quite hungry. All my choking, sick feeling is gone; and I should be glad of my breakfast, now, that I couldn't swallow before;" she added laughing.

"I oughtn't to have been in such a hurry to throw it away;" said Sebastian, in the same tone; "it would be very welcome, if we had it here; eating in the open air is so pleasant."

"Never mind; the pain of being hungry isn't half so bad, as being forced to eat when you can't swallow;" said Viola cheerfully. "I had rather twenty times be here, in this beautiful place, and a little hungry, than shut up in that stifling house, with plenty of food before me that I can't get down."

"I suppose it's time for us to be thinking of going back;" added she, with a sigh; and a timid look crossing her face, as she thought of monna Marcella.

"Not yet," said Sebastian. "Let us go and see what those men are doing in that boat yonder which has just come ashore."

The children stood watching the proceedings of the fishermen, much amused; they saw the men land their haul, divide it, and separate in the direction of their several huts.

The last man that lingered, took up his share of fish, and went into the nearest hut, close down upon the sea-brink. The two children, half unconsciously, followed, interested in his doings. The door of the hut stood open, and the children could see what went on inside. It showed the interior of a kitchen, which opened at once from the outer entrance. At the table stood a woman, busily employed in preparing the fish, which her husband had just brought in; while he went and lay in the shade, on a wooden bench, beneath a trellis covered with passion-flower, at the side of the house. While it simmered, she cut some sippets of bread into a large bowl; and when it was done, she poured the hot savoury mess, upon the thin layers of bread, and her dish of fish was ready. It smelt so

relishing, and looked so delicious that, joined to their previous appetites, the two children could scarce resist the urgent promptings they felt to ask if they might not partake of the feast.

The expression of their faces so markedly painted this feeling, that,—on the good woman's raising her eyes and catching theirs, as she lifted the smoking bowl from the dresser, preparatory to taking it out under the trellis,—she could not help exclaiming to herself:—"What two pretty creatures! They're as like as two almonds in one shell! They look mortal hungry. I've a good mind to ask 'em if they'll have some fish with us. Rocco's had a good haul to day; we can well spare some. Hé, Piccinini! What say ye to coming under the trellis with us, and eating a bit? You shall be right welcome, for the sake of your pretty little twin 'visetti!'"

The two children joyfully followed the good woman into the shade of the arbour; where, with true Italian rustic taste, the fisherman and his family were wont to take their meals. The benches and table were rudely hewn, it is true; the bowls and trenchers were of the commonest kind; but the thick-trained passion-flower over-head, the glorious view of the sea and rocks of the bay, seen through the supports of the trellis, together with the kind, hearty manners of their entertainers, combined to make this one of the most exquisite repasts the children had ever enjoyed. The fisherman resumed his lolling on the bench, and dozed off into a 'siesta;' his wife betook herself to her household duties; and their son Giorgio lounged down on the beach, to join some companions of his own age, who were capering in the shallow water, and scrambling into the boats, and rocking themselves to and fro, and pulling about the boat-hooks and the oars, and making a great show of seamanship.

The two children had followed Giorgio, and stood watching him and the other boys, as they pursued their evolutions in the boats.

Sebastian had been earnestly engaged, observing the movements of two lads, who had unmoored one of the small vessels, and were now slowly paddling themselves across the bay.

"How I should like to be with them!" exclaimed Sebastian, half to himself, half to his sister.

"It looks very pleasant," she said, as she shaded her eyes with her hand, and stood watching them, with her brother.

Presently, a woman passing along the strand, called out to one of the boys idling in the near boats, to come from his play, for it was late, and she wanted him.

"Late!" echoed Viola, with a start, and a tone of alarm. "Oh, what shall we do? What will monna Marcella say? She will be so angry—oh, so angry! All she has ever done to punish us, will be nothing to what she will invent now;" said Viola. "I daren't go back; oh, I daren't go back!"

"Then don't let us go back;" said Sebastian. "The place is detestable. She is detestable. Why should we go back to either? It's more like a prison than a home. It's no home to us. Let's find one of our own."

"That would be delightful;" said Viola. "But where shall we find it?"

"I'll tell you what I've been thinking, Viola;" said her young brother. "Why shouldn't we do as those boys did? Get into a boat, and push ourselves away from the shore, and go and look for some of those beautiful lands beyond sea; where there must be plenty of pleasant homes to choose from."

"Papa talked of brave countries abroad; and perhaps we may meet him! Wouldn't that be joyful? He sailed away upon the sea, you know. If we were to meet his ship! Eh, Sebastian?" And Viola's soft eyes brightened with childish glee.

"Who knows? We can but try;" he answered. "Here, give me your hand; I'll help you into the boat, and I can leap in after."

"Do you think you shall be able to manage the boat?" said Viola, as she obeyed his directions, and stepped in.

"Oh yes; I've been watching those boys all this time; and I'm sure I can do what I saw them do;" he replied confidently.

"How pleasantly it glides along;" said Viola, charmed with the smooth motion of the boat; "and how safely it is taking us away from the chance of that cruel monna Marcella's finding us."

Luckily for the two children, the sea had not a ripple. Sebastian soon found that his strength was insufficient to lift, far less to use, the large oars which lay in the boat; but there was a long boat-hook, much lighter, with which he contrived to push off the craft, and to guide it through the shallower portion of the bay. The truth was, what slight current there was, drifted them gently out to sea, and bore them along independent of any effort on the part of the young boatman.

So long as the shores of the bay were near at hand, seeming to protect them by their placid green beauty, the children went on happily enough, delighted with their adventure, and with a sense of escape and safety. But as they got farther from land, and the expanse of waters seemed to spread widening out on all sides of them, without offering any prospect of haven or refuge, Viola began to cast anxious looks at her brother's face, to see whether she could detect any glimpse of uncertainty, or misgiving, as to their position.

"Viola," said the boy, "come here, and help me to push with this pole; I don't know how it is, but it don't seem to make the boat mind what I want it to do."

"The boat seems to go on very nicely, I think;" said Viola, in a dubious tone.

"Yes, it *goes on* very well;" said her brother, with his eyes fixed on the fast-fading shore.

Viola came and placed herself by her brother's side, trying to understand all his directions for the proper swaying of the boat-hook, which he used in manner of a scull, at the stern. The two children showed the native gentleness of their dispositions, in this moment of trial. Not one word of impatience or fretfulness, fell from either; he directed her energetically, but with nothing of boyish petulance; and she obeyed him without a syllable of murmur, or utterance of teazing fear. Left to the impulses of their own sweet natures, these two young creatures proved that neither harshness, nor authority, was requisite to make them act rightly. Out upon the open sea, with no human eye to control them, they behaved with loving, mutual help, and kindliness.

After a time, Viola ventured to cast one anxious look round

upon the wide-spreading world of waters on every side; and the tone of relief and exultation with which she exclaimed:—"Sebastian! we're coming to some land!" showed how keen had been her previous solicitude. As much was confessed in the voice with which he echoed:—"Land, Viola!" and by the eager look he cast over his shoulder.

It was true. They were approaching the shore of one of those numerous islands which lie dotted along that coast, rising out of the serene waters of the Adriatic, verdant and fruitful,—exuberant in vegetation and in beauty.

The children exerted all their strength, to push vigorously, and to guide the boat right against the shelving beach. Their manœuvre was crowned with success; and their little bark came with a kind of smooth crunching, right on to the shingly sand.

Sebastian assisted Viola out; and as he sprang out himself, after her, he couldn't help giving her a hug, which she returned, for joy to find themselves safe on dry land again.

"I wonder what place this is!" said Viola. "If it should be a desert island! or inhabited only by savages!"

"It don't look like a wild, or desert place, such as the stories tell of;" answered he, looking about. "See! yonder's a vine-yard, and farther on there's an olive-ground. Stay; you sit there, on that slope of turf; while I creep in here, and pick up some of the fruit I see scattered on the ground under these orchard-trees, just above, here. It will not be stealing; for you know nobody thinks anything of the wind-falls. I shall not gather any, only take those that have dropped of themselves."

Presently he returned with a lapful of pears, peaches, and ripe figs; and he sat down beside her, while she arranged them temptingly on dishes of vine-leaves, and the two children enjoyed their supper together, like 'making a feast.'

"Don't you feel as if it were an immense time ago, Viola, since we were living in that dismal house, with that dismal woman? To me it seems as if it were,—oh, I don't know how long,—years ago!"

"Yes; I can hardly believe it was only this very morning, that we came away;" said she. "But then we have seen so

many new things, and people, and places, and have gone through such adventures, and made a sea-voyage, you know! So that it isn't wonderful it should seem a long while since."

After the children had refreshed themselves with a hearty draught at a fountain, they wandered on, along the edge of the broad water-course, beneath the shady, green-fringed banks of the wood. The glow of the day was subsiding into a gorgeous-hued evening, when the two young wanderers came to a spot, where they at once made a halt. It was a deep hollow, or cave, beneath the banks; overhung by the trees, and underwood, and trailing plants, of the copse. Its floor was strewn with a thick layer of dried leaves, that had drifted in, and lodged there, for many successive autumns; while its low roof was over-arched with a verdant screen of clustering myrtles, hazels, and flaunting briony.

"What a pleasant seat! What a soft delicious bed, this would make!" exclaimed Viola, letting herself sink upon the springy, elastic heap of leaves. "What a snug, charming nook, altogether!"

"What a delightful home it would make for us!" said her brother, couching beside her. "Where could we find any place we should like better,—to live in; eh, Viola? Why not fix, at once, on this one?"

"Why not?" she replied, in a triumphantly assenting tone.

The two little householders took possession of their new abode by ensconcing and settling themselves comfortably in two huge, high-piled beds of leaves. The eyes of the two children were fixed upon the calm beauty of sky and sea; their thoughts took that shape of devout gratitude and reliance, which is the spontaneous form of prayer, arising untaught in innocent hearts; and their last uttered words,—in a happy, going-to-sleep tone,—were, "Good night, Viola!" "Good night, Sebastian!"

The next morning, with the dawn, they were up and stirring; making their house tidy; sweeping all the stray leaves into the heaped beds, so as to leave an unscattered floor between.

When they at length quitted their umbrageous resting-place, they rambled down, through the covert, until they came upon

a rural dwelling, situated just at its foot. The two children were lingering near the open door, when a girl came out, with a pitcher of green glazed earthenware on her head, a basket full of bright scarlet love-apples in her hand, an orange-coloured handkerchief on her neck, and a sprig of jessamine tucked into her hair, behind her ear. She cast a wondering look at the two little strangers, and then called to her mother, who was busy inside the cottage, to come and looked at these two pretty creatures,—'Maravigliosamente simili! Ma similissimi!'

The mother came, and exclaimed with equal delight and wonder at the 'gentilissimi gemelli,' as she called them; and then, fancying that they looked as if they had been wandering far, she asked them to come in and rest. The two children accepted her offer with alacrity, and sat watching her, as she bustled about her household affairs. She was making 'maccaroni,' of which she offered them to eat; and gave them also a plate of thinly-cut raw ham, eaten with 'fallecciani,' or early figs; these she took out of a large round basket, filled with fruit. She told them that this basket was packed ready to go up to the great house; that she was a tenant of the lady who lived there; and that she regularly sent some of her choicest fruit for the 'padrona's' table.

Of this great house, and this lady, the children heard a great deal, she seemed to be a kind woman, charitable and good, but very particular. Her estate was large, and gave her almost universal sway over the island and its peasant inhabitants, of which and of whom, she seemed to be a sort of queen.

As the two children were returning home to their cave, they beheld a coach, or litter, rumbling along; and presently they saw Jacò, the 'Caporale di Bovi,' tearing across the field, where his charge roamed; and heard him shouting to them to come and be harnessed to the 'padrona's' coach, that they might help the horses to drag it up the steep rise on which her house lay. The twins loitered, that they might see the interesting ceremony of fastening the milk-white oxen into the traces; and likewise in the hope that they might catch a glimpse of the stately 'padrona' of whom they had heard so much.

As the coach halted, to await the coming of the assistant

team, Viola and Sebastian could see withinside, the slight, diminutive figure of a little old lady; who leaned forward, looked out of the coach-window, peered about impatiently, and exclaimed with dabby irritation:—"Dear me! I wonder what ails them that they don't bring these cattle. What can the people be about? Bless me! why an't they ready?"

"'Cause they an't, I s'pose;" was the somewhat unsatisfactory reply, that proceeded from a loutish youth, seated beside her in the coach.

"Dear me! What if you were to get out, and hasten these people, with their cattle, my dear boy?" said the lady.

"What if I wasn't?" retorted the lad.

"Well,—I don't know,—dear me—it might hurry their movements a little;" meekly dabbed the little old lady.

"It might, or it mightn't'sh, ye see;" rejoined the lout. "Anyways, I can't see what's the odds, whether they hurry or no; it can't signify for a minute more or less." And he whistled; showing how perfectly immaterial it was to him.

"Dear me, quite true; certainly, as you say, my dear boy, it is not of much moment, if I reach home a few minutes sooner or later. Still, I'm fond of early hours——"

"Ah! minutes an't hours, ye see;" observed the youth, sententiously. "Oh, here come the oxes! Come, you sir! look sharp, will you?" he added, addressing the 'Caporale di Bovi,' with a startling shout from the coach-window. "Hallo! Jacò! Be alive, young chap! Don't'sh ye see my lady's in a mortal hurry and flustration to get home."

"In three seconds, 'padrona!'" said the 'Caporale,' touching his cap to his lady mistress.

"Ah, she'll 'padrona' you, if you don't bustle your bones a little quicker, master!" said the lout, hanging out of the window, and touching up the ear of one of the white oxen, with the tip of his cane; while the 'Caporale di Bovi' solaced his disgust at the upstart young gentleman's insolence, by stealthily making one of his expressive Italian gesticulations, indicating measureless contempt.

While these amenities were going on at one side of the coach, on the other, lady Annuccia happened to catch sight of

the two children, who stood there, side-by-side, hand-in-hand, looking on.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed; "well I never thought to see such another pair,—so singular a couple,—so perfectly twin—so alike—so—dear me! well! It's extraordinary, I'm sure!"

"What now?" cried her boy companion, drawing his head leisurely into the coach.

"Dear me! well,—the most wonderful resemblance! Not only to each other,—but, dear me,—to my nephew's little boy and girl in Messaline. They were mere babies when I saw them; but still, I can remember, they were as like those two children yonder, as anything can be. Two cherries on a stalk, are not more alike, than these young things are to one another, and to my nephew's twins! Dear me!"

The little old lady leaned back, and gasped; fanned herself faintly; and then stooped forward once more, and called, with more than her usual dabby feebleness of tone:—"Come hither, children! Dear me! Come hither, I say!"

Viola and Sebastian seeing the 'padrona' beckon with her fan, advanced towards the coach-window.

"My dears! Bless me! Well,—dear me,—I never! The nearer they come, the more striking the likeness! Dear me! Well,—ahem,—my dears, tell me; what are your names?"

"Sebastian, madam;" } they simultaneously replied.
"Viola, madam;" }

"It is they themselves!" ejaculated the little old lady, sinking back into the coach, with another gasp. Then jerking forward again:—"Bless me! I never knew anything so amazing! So you are actually your own selves, are you? Dear me! I should never have thought it! I should never have dreamed it possible,—dear me,—that you should have left home,—that I should see you here,—alone, ragged; all your pretty clothes faded and torn. My poor young dears! Bless me; pray come in; come into my coach. I shall be delighted,—of course—to take you home; to hear all about you, why you are here, and so forth. Dear me, to be sure!"

And the 'padrona,'—who was no other than their aunt Annuccia herself—made the children get in, seating them on

the opposite seat to her, and went dab-dab-dabbing on, while the lad beside her, sat staring at them, with what would have been an open mouth, had it not been partially closed into the utterance of a low whistle of astonishment.

At the top of the steep and long hill the coach turned into a pair of lofty iron gates, which formed the entrance to lady Annuccia's grounds. She gave orders for the appointment of certain rooms for her young visitors, and desired one of her women to make it her care that the twin brother and sister should want for nothing.

That night, a violent tempest arose. The wind blew a perfect hurricane; and as Viola lay and listened to its howling gusts, she congratulated herself that she and her brother were safely housed, beneath better shelter than their cave-home could have afforded.

Next morning, the sun shone out again brightly, and the blue sky was apparent in all its Italian vividness.

"Viola and I would like to take a walk together, if you please, madam;" said Sebastian. "We should like to go down to the beach, and see the high waves, this morning; and the torrent—whether it is full; and our cave, whether it has been washed into."

"Well—dear me—though I don't approve, in general, of solitary walks for young ladies; yet with their brothers, there can be no impropriety. Go, my dears; but be back by noon to dinner. I like punctuality in my hours."

The children promised; and went off in their usual happy, hand-in-hand fashion.

They rambled as far as their cave. At the entrance they paused, and peeped in. Upon one of the heaps of unwetted leaves, lay a man in a fast sleep. He seemed, by his dress, a mariner; its torn condition, and his attitude bespoke fatigue, and struggle with the waves and rocks. He looked flung there—spent, bruised, and dead weary. The children stood gazing at him, with sympathy and commiseration in their faces.

"He is one of the shipwrecked men from the vessel we heard of, that went down, last night;" whispered Sebastian.

"Look there, brother!" said she, in the same low pitch; but

her tone and her excited manner, caught his attention. "Look there, upon his forehead!" she repeated.

She stepped softly nearer; and leaned, breathless, over the sleeping man. She put back the locks of sea-stained hair, very gently; and then whispered:—"It must be, brother! It must be our father! Do you not see the little brown mole? My own dear little mole! I should know it wherever I saw it!"

She could not refrain; but bent down, and touched it with her lips. However light the contact, it was felt. The sleeper stirred, and unclosed his eyes. As they met the soft violet ones, that peered above him—and as his scarce awakened senses inhaled the fragrance of the child's breath, and of her balmy hair, falling on either side her sweet face, and hanging over his—he let them close again, murmuring:—"Still dreaming! My little Viola! My pretty one!"

"I am here, papa!" she said; "Sebastian too! Look at us, dear papa!"

Her brother stood by her side; and when the happy father again raised his eyes, it was to encounter with his waking sight, the living, actual faces of his twin boy and girl; while he clasped in his eager, glad embrace, their veritable selves.

"It is predestined that you shall never cease to have strange guests coming and taking you by storm, aunt Annuccia;" said the merchant, as they all sat a happy party at the old lady's noon-tide table. "Here have my children been claiming your hospitable kindness no farther back than yesterday. And this morning, when they go out for a couple of hours' stroll, they return, punctually, indeed, as you bade them, to dinner; but bringing with them a wandering father, who now comes back a penniless beggar. But though he has lost his all, he does not intend remaining a dependent on your bounty. Present food and lodging I receive most gratefully, and will be farther beholden to you for the maintenance and care of my children, until such season as I can re-claim them of you, and support them myself. It is true, the bulk of my fortune has perished by this shipwreck, but I have my merchant-house at Messaline. I shall set sail again immediately; work hard to retrieve my

losses; and hope, within less time than we now think, to be once more the prosperous merchant I was yesterday."

"Dear me, well—I hope so; I'm sure I trust so, my dear boy—my dear nephew. And as for taking charge of these little darlings during your absence—I'm sure I shall be delighted—of course;" replied his aunt.

The issue justified his hope. Not many months elapsed, ere he was able to send lady Annuccia accounts of his numerous successes, together with a large sum of money; begging her to appropriate it for the behoof of his children, and to accept his loving thanks for her care of them.

Time thus passed on. Year succeeded year; and yet the only intelligence they had of the merchant, was either by letter or by message; for still he eagerly pursued his purpose of achieving wealth for his children.

Viola had grown, from a child, into a beautiful girl of twelve years old. Her brother had shot up into a tall stripling, slight, and agile. Between himself and his sister, there was still the same remarkable similarity of frame and feature; and, although, as they grew up, their suits varied more, yet when dressed precisely alike, the resemblance was no less striking than ever.

The ascendancy which her uncouth favourite, the youth, Gabino, had gained over the little old lady, became greater and greater. He lost no opportunity of cajoling her in private; while outwardly he continued his overbearing bluffness. He made no secret, *to her*, of his dread that Sebastian should rival him in her favour. He chose to be her pet boy, her own boy, her only boy.

A whimsy, which the old lady's silly fondness prompted her with, in order to please her lout, was to get up a feast unknown to him, at which she resolved that the twin brother and sister should attend as young lady guests. She determined that they should both be dressed as girls; and took an imbecile delight in knowing how perfectly Sebastian's slight figure, and youthful beauty of face, would enable her to carry out her design of deceiving Gabino, while she pictured his approbation at seeing no boys present but himself.

Sebastian, of course, made no hesitation in humouring this freak of the old lady's; and with the help of one of Viola's dresses, he transformed himself into such a precise counterpart of his sister, that lady Annuccia was in an ecstasy.

After admiring, and exclaiming, to her heart's content, at the marvellous beauty and likeness of the two charming young ladies, as she called them, she dismissed Sebastian to the sitting-room, where she promised to join him with Viola, so soon as the last finishing touch to her own dress (which was to be extra fine on this festal occasion, to do honour to her favourite), should have been added.

While Sebastian was awaiting them, Gabino entered the room. He saw, as he thought, the figure of Viola, standing at the window. He stole behind her, exclaiming as he seized her in his arms, and strove to snatch a kiss:—"Limed at last, my pretty dear!"

To his infinite surprise, he received a sound box on the ear; and the young lady twisted herself out of his embrace with a vigour that staggered him.

"Young vixen!" he muttered; "and how confounded strong!"

At that moment, in came lady Annuccia, with the real Viola; and while her lubberly favourite stood rubbing his discomfited cheek, and staring in oafish bewilderment from one Viola to the other; the little old lady enjoyed her dabby triumph at his perplexity.

"Brute! No wonder Viola finds him odious!" thought Viola's brother, as he watched the fellow gormandizing at table; gorging the dainties provided by lady Annuccia; gobbling till he choked; strangling himself with the wine he swilled, and coughing in his glass; winking jocularly at the young ladies; noisily toasting the elder one; getting into violent spirits, and growing perfectly uproarious; while lady Annuccia encouraged his sallies, by her laughter, and her dabby commendation.

As soon as they could, Viola and Sebastian made their escape from the dinner, and went to take a cool walk in the open air, among the shrubberies adjoining the house.

They had been there about an hour, when Annunziata came

hurrying towards them, with dismay in her usually quiet face. "My lady! My poor lady! Oh, come in quickly to her, signorina!" she exclaimed, to Viola. "She has been taken ill, very ill; a surfeit—a fever—I hardly know what! I fear she has eaten too many of them sweetmeats, and almond mischiefs, that she would have cook make for this feast. It's all owing to that Gabino. If mistress should die, it it'll be found, for all his awkward, hobbedehoy, dolt's ways, he's had shrewdness to play his game well. Thick-head as he is, he knows fast enough, which side his bread's buttered."

The event fulfilled Annunziata's hint. That night lady Annuccia died; and when her will was opened, it was discovered that Gabino had been named her sole heir.

Viola was sittingly mournfully in lady Annuccia's parlour, recalling the little old lady's many acts of kindness towards her brother and herself, and lamenting, with tears, her loss, when Sebastian burst into the room, exclaiming:—"Viola! Viola! Where are you? Who do you think is here? Papa's come! Papa's arrived!"

"Papa!" was her joyful ejaculation. And away they both ran to meet him.

It was a happy return, of the merchant and his children to Messaline. As they sat together on the deck of the vessel, during their short sea-passage, from the island homeward, the father indulged in happy prospects for the future. "Why, you will be thirteen, soon, I declare. To-morrow is your birth-day, my Viola!"

"And Sebastian's, dear father;" she replied, in her gentle, musical tone. "We shall have you with us, to spend it in all due joyful celebration!"

He went on to tell them of his prosperous voyages; of his profitable speculations; of the wealth he had amassed; and of the delight with which it was dedicated to their use and enjoyment. He told them of the valuable connections he had formed; and dwelt with pride and pleasure on the friendships he had acquired. He spoke with peculiar fervour and exultation of the intimate affection that had subsisted between him-

self and the late duke of Illyria; and of the one (in which it was renewed and maintained) that still existed between the duke's son, Orsino, and himself. He expatiated on the many virtues and excellences that adorned this noble young man; and said he had admirably fulfilled the promise of his boyhood.

"I remember;" said the melodious voice of Viola, as her soft eyes looked out musingly across the sea; "when I was quite a little girl, I heard you speak of that noble, handsome boy! I could wish to see him."

"It has long been a favourite dream of mine, to take my children with me to Illyria, that they may learn to esteem and love him as I do!" said the father. "The dukedom is happy in being ruled by so well-governed a youth! Some day or other, when those same studies you wot of, shall have enabled us to appear with credit among our fellows, and have graced us for a court-life, we will first visit Venice, and, on our return, present ourselves at Orsino's capital, as his friends and guests."

Next morning, with earliest dawn, the twin son and daughter were at their parent's chamber door, to greet his awakening ears, with a little dual song, which they had prepared together, for the occasion.

As their mingled voices died away at the close, he came forth from his room, with loving smiles, and a cordial blessing.

The morning passed serenely, and happily; and their festive meal was brought out into the balcony, that an additional air of holiday entertainment, and 'al fresco' enjoyment, might be given to their banquet.

The father's spirits were in a mood of contented, placid joy; he was about to quaff a goblet of Cyprus wine to the health and happiness of the twin monarchs of the day; when he started up, declaring that the cup should be crowned with roses, to do fitting honour to his pledge, and leaned over the marble coping, to gather some of the clustering half-blown blossoms of his favourite flower, which grew in profusion, trained in front of the high balcony.

He had plucked several; when, stretching imprudently far, in eagerness to reach a peculiarly beautiful bud, the father

unhappily lost his balance, fell forward, and came with the whole weight of his body to the ground.

When his agonized children reached the spot they found him lifeless.

The period of mourning for their father, was spent by the orphan brother and sister, in strict seclusion, and in carrying out those plans for their mental culture and improvement, which he had suggested.

After some years devoted to study, and to the perfecting of Viola's taste for music, in which art she attained an exquisite proficiency, Sebastian and his twin-sister resolved to pay the visit to Venice, which their father had projected for them.

The twin brother and sister set sail for Venice. But they had not proceeded far on their voyage, when a terrific storm arose. The ship struck upon a rock; split and went to pieces. In the confusion of that fatal moment, Viola was separated from Sebastian, and hastily lifted by the captain into a small boat; which some of the crew had lowered over the side of the fast-sinking vessel. With the captain, and this poor remnant of his men, she suddenly found herself cast upon a strange shore, alone, desolate, almost despairing of ever again beholding in life that beloved brother, with whom every hour of her previous existence had been spent. Heart-forlorn, and well-nigh hopeless, she turned to her companions, saying:—"*What country, friends, is this?*"

TWELFTH NIGHT, Act i. Sc. 2.

TALE XV.

IMOGEN; THE PEERLESS.

BRITAIN triumphed. Her hardy sons had repulsed the invading Roman, and forced mightiest Cæsar himself to give back. But victory—as ever with such victories,—came hand-in-hand with mourning. The royal Cassibelan, while rejoicing at his people's brave achievement, had to deplore the loss of him who had mainly aided its success. His brother Nennius lay at point of death. Fifteen days he languished beneath his mortal wounds; and before the day fixed for the celebration of the victory arrived, he had ceased to breathe.

The king had published a decree, summoning all the nobility of Britain, with their wives, to his capital of Trinovantum, in order to render, with sacrificial rites and offerings, solemn thanks to their tutelary gods; who had granted them conquest over so great a commander as renowned Julius. He had also called the companions of his victory together, that he might amply reward them, every one, accordingly as they had severally distinguished themselves; and now, this appointed solemn rejoicing, for which the chief of his realm were convened together, he resolved should be mingled with the sad but honouring tribute of a national celebration, in his brother's funeral exequies. He appointed them to be performed with regal pomp; and decreed that they should take place on the first day of the general assemblage; that,—the mournful observances fulfilled,—the rest of the time might be devoted to its original object of triumph and thanksgiving.

The procession took its way to the North gate of the city, as

the ordained place of sepulture. Cassibelan would have chosen the one built by his predecessor and elder brother, Lud; but that it bore its builder's name, and he wished no other fame to overshadow his, who was now to be consigned to immortality. For the same reason, he forbore to have the body of Nennius deposited near that gate of noble structure, which had been erected by his royal ancestor Belinus, upon the bank of the Thames. This goodly edifice consisted of a large tower, which had beneath, a fine haven, or quay, for ships; but on the summit of the tower, was a golden urn, in which lay the ashes of king Belinus, causing the edifice to be known ever after as Belin's gate.

To the end that exclusive and impressive honours might be paid to the memory of his valiant brother, Cassibelan decided that in the tomb should be placed, and buried with him, that sword he had mastered; Cæsar's sword, known by the name of terrible significance, 'Crocea mors,'—as being mortal to every body that was wounded with it. He also determined, himself to pronounce the funeral oration over his beloved brother's remains; that the people might learn the full extent of Nennius's heroic deeds, which should thus be treasured in their hearts while they lived, and be transmitted, in trumpet eulogy of tradition, to their posterity.

In sad and solemn pomp, the funeral train proceeded. First came a troop of virgins, clad in white, with long mourning veils, two and two, hand-in-hand, bearing each a cypress branch. Immediately following, were the venerable forms of the Druids, and Bards, with flowing white beards, and close-shorn snowy hairs, crowned with oak; the former carried, every one, a wand or staff, emblematical of their magician power; and wore, hung about their necks, inclosed in gold, the charmed serpent's egg; the latter, to their harps decked with mistletoe, chanted dirges, and lamenting strains, interspersed with hymnal eulogies, and elegiac songs, recording the exploits of the brave deceased. At their head was the Arch-Druid, clothed in sacerdotal robes; wearing on his head a resplendent diadem of burnished gold, figuring the rays of the meridian sun. Next, came a number of British matrons in sable garments, with garlands of yew, and

cypress; and in their hands, wreaths of rue, and rosemary, with green boughs of shining laurel. Then, a band of warriors, whose rugged features and stern-set looks had hard ado to maintain a firm countenance beneath their manly grief for the brother-in-arms they had lost. After them came, high-raised upon a war-chariot, the body of Nennius, exposed to reverent view; around him were ranged his victorious arms, his shield, his spear, and his heavy battle-axe, each of which in turn he had used with success against the invaders of his country; while upon his breast lay his last and proudest trophy, that which had cost him his life,—Cæsar's sword.

Behind the car came the king. Bare-headed, in simplest mourning garment, with brotherly sorrow and brotherly pride contending for the mastery in his face, he walked alone; followed at a few paces distance by his body-page, bearing the golden circlet, symbol of rule and sovereignty; which, in this moment of humility and heart-dejection, Cassibelan had put off. Next in order, came his two nephews, Androgeus and Tenantius, sons of the late king; and after them, the procession was closed by a long train of the nobility, soldiery, and populace.

Arrived at the place of burial, the train formed into a broad-spreading circle round the car, while their monarch ascended into it, and taking his stand beside the dead body of his brother, addressed the people.

At the conclusion of their king's speech, the people sent up a shout, such as Britons' lungs have been famous for, from time immemorial; one of those hearty sounds so impressively proclaiming the impulse, the feeling, and the will of the multitude, put into a single potent roar of sympathy.

So soon as the rites of sepulture had been performed, and the body of Nennius committed to its glorious tomb, the sacrificial offerings to the gods were commenced. For the due celebration of so important a victory, there was a vast slaughter and destruction. As a votive tribute to Jove, sovereign of gods and men, (who could only be propitiated for the sacrificed lives of those who had fallen in battle by the immolation of additional lives—so the people were told, on the best authority; that is,

the best they had, that of their Pagan priests,) the Druids had had constructed, a gigantic image of wicker-work; which was filled with living men, and then set fire to. The beings who thus perished, were criminals, reserved for the purpose; as (so stated on the same authority) peculiarly acceptable. To Mars were sacrificed all the prisoners left alive; and the chief of the spoil taken in fight, was, by order of the sacrificing priests, gathered together, and carried to an appointed spot. Heaps of valuables thus collected, were put aside, in certain consecrated places; and rarely was any one so regardless of religion, or so hardy, as to dare secretly to retain any portion, or to take it away when thus stored; since for such a sin there was adjudged a very severe punishment, accompanied with torture. Various sacrifices of cattle were offered up at this solemnity; several thousand cows, sheep, and fowls of several kinds, besides wild beasts of divers description.

After all these sacred rites, in honour and thanksgiving to their gods, had been performed, they feasted themselves with the remainder, as was their wont on such occasions; and spent the successive day and night in various national sports.

Cassibelan's two nephews, at the conclusion of the orgy, secretly communed together concerning their joint prospects. They were the sons of Lud, the late king; who dying when they were in their minority, had been succeeded by his brother, Cassibelan.

"And you think the voice of the country would be for us, in the event of aught occurring to shake Cassibelan in his royal seat?" said Androgeus.

"I am sure of it;" answered Tenantius. "The people of Britain are ever just and right in the side they take, when freedom of choice is theirs."

"You who esteem them thus highly should be their king;" replied his brother. "Once more, if ever such a chance of kingship should revert to us, be its advantage all yours. I have made up my mind to depart from Britain, and resort to Rome. There, lies a field for wider and nobler ambition. There, knowledge, civilization, arts, letters, flourish; and there will I endeavour to attain a peace of spirit, which here may not be mine. You shall let me take with me your young boy, Cymbeline;

that he may have the advantage of Roman education and polish. If ever thou sett'st thy foot on Britain's throne, send to me for him; and I will return him to thee a more accomplished prince, yet a no less loving son."

Thus it was finally arranged between them; and the brothers bade each other farewell, Androgeus taking his young nephew Cymbeline with him abroad, while Tenantius remained in his native country, awaiting patiently any propitious turn that affairs might take.

These schemes of incipient royal policy, were soon to be put into action. Upon the death of Cassibelan, Tenantius succeeded to the throne of Britain; Androgeus died; and his nephew, the young prince Cymbeline, no longer detained in Rome, took leave of the emperor Augustus, bade farewell to his friends and companions-in-arms, and set sail for Britain.

Tenantius, during the time that he ruled, fulfilled the predictions of his brother Androgeus. He made a good and worthy king. His chief endeavour was to preserve his realm in peace and tranquillity; and he was a strict observer and enforcer of justice. So that when his reign came to a close, his son Cymbeline found that he had less opposition to encounter, in his succession to his father's throne, than from the contentious spirit which then prevailed, might have been anticipated.

His queen Guendolen, had brought him two fair sons, named Guiderius and Aviragus; but when these princes were yet infants, they had been stolen from the royal palace, and no clue as to who the robbers might be could be obtained.

For some time after their loss, and when every effort to trace its origin, or to recover them, had proved unavailing, the king fell into a state of sullen, despondent wrath. He was morose with those about him; and even his wife was not unfrequently the recipient of his moody humours.

When the little Imogen was born, and her mother had the joy of placing her in her father's arms, with the timid hope that she might prove a solace for his former bereavement, Guendolen had fondly pointed out to her husband that the infant bore upon its breast a mark precisely similar to one which had existed on the neck of their eldest-born child, Guiderius.

"See, dear husband, this little crimson-specked mole, like the velvet touches in the cup of a flower! Just such a flecked carnation spot,—in shape, a bright and glowing star,—had our boy, Guiderius! She is sent to replace him to us, in baby beauty, as in love."

The cloud that came athwart Cymbeline's face at her words, warned his wife, that the revival of the thought of his first-born whom he had lost, outweighed in bitterness, the pleasure of the image of happy substitution, which she would fain have conveyed. From that moment, she secretly resolved never to revive the names of their sons; but to devote all her endeavours to the centring of his affections upon their little daughter.

In this she succeeded. The king had never been so fond, so indulgent. He lavished the most profuse tokens of affection upon both mother and child. He would yield himself to all the sportive whims of the child, lying with it on the floor; allowing it to roll, and tumble, and crawl over him; to tug his hair, to pat his face; and amidst all, would betray how keen a sense he had of his own condescension, by calling on his wife to look at the low-laid head of the king who had held a successful struggle with Cæsar, now pulled about at the mercy of an infant girl.

The little Imogen grew very fond of this indulgent, playfellow father. Long before she could talk, she knew him, and could welcome him by her own inarticulate, but significant language of welcome; by happy crows, and bright, expressive looks.

Imogen was still quite a baby, when Cymbeline was called into the western district of his kingdom, to march against a rebellious force that had mustered there, against him. Although he was nominally sovereign of Britain, his realm was perpetually disturbed by internal divisions. In parting from his wife and child, for an indefinite period, and for the purpose of engaging in a desperate battle, Cymbeline was loath to leave his home, loath to encounter all the fatigues, anxieties, and perils, of a civil war. But there was no one to whom he could with safety trust the charge of heading his men, and leading them against the insurgents; and he accordingly decided upon doing so himself.

The western insurrection was more speedily and thoroughly

quelled, than Cymbeline could have hoped. But its field of action was far removed; and in those times, crossing from one extremity of the island to the other was a work of time. The king's return was attended with considerable delay; and he was still on the borders of Cambria, when he was entering a thick forest, after having made his way across an extensive morass. Suddenly from among the densest of the underwood, darted a form that seemed like some wild animal; so agile its motion, so bright and fierce its eyes, so matted and tangled its elf-locks of hair, and so bare its limbs, as it sprang to the rein of Cymbeline's horse, and clung there, crying :—"Good-morrow, cousin king!" Cymbeline started, and recoiled, as at something unearthly; for scarce human did this strange, lithe, gaunt, yet dwarfish being seem. The attendant soldiers crowded round their royal master, offering to strike the creature off.

But the king raised his hand.

"I'll not leave my cousin king!" exclaimed this curious being, in a voice singularly at variance with his uncouth exterior. It was as harmonious and beautiful, as all else was rugged, wild, and incongruous.

One of the king's guards made a feigned blow at him with his partisan, whirling it close round his head, and letting it fall heavily on the ground within an inch of him; but no flinching, not so much as the stir of a limb, or the quiver of an eyelid, betokened fear.

The king was interested; his soldierly instincts were aroused; his despotic humour amused. He called to one of his officers, and whispered him. The men were led off, and stationed apart.

"Wilt not quit me, sirrah?" he said to the strange creature that still clung to his bridle-rein.

"Not with life, cousin king!" was the reply.

"Bind him!" exclaimed Cymbeline.

Two of the guards seized hold of the young savage, wrenched him from the vice-like grasp he had on the horse's bit, and bound him fast, his arms behind him. He remained motionless.

The rest of the soldiers drew up in line, awaiting the king's farther command.

"Archers, take aim at his heart!" cried the king in a stern voice.

"Wilt thou now promise to leave me in peace?" asked Cymbeline.

"I care little for life, and fear naught of death; but have ta'en a whim for cousin king!" returned the young savage.

"Let fly, then, archers! And be sure you hit the *hart!*" cried the king, with a loud laugh.

The bowmen, as previously instructed, through the whispered order to their officer, sent a flight of arrows right over the lad's head, into the thicket immediately behind him.

"Cut his bonds; and go see if there be not a wild deer in the covert; methought I marked one lurking there;" said the king, still laughing, to the soldiers; "better make quarry of a hart that will roast, and furnish good eating, than of a heart that is too tough to yield, and therefore promises but sorry fare."

"That should be a morsel for a monarch!" said the lad, in the same tone; and flinging his freed arms about joyfully. "Make it yours, cousin king! Reserve it for thine own especial tooth and keeping. Do but chew it patiently and tolerantly; and thou shalt find it a sweet kernel, within a rough husk. 'Tis like the fruit that grows upon this hazel-twig;" he continued, drawing a small rod from his girdle, and switching it smartly to and fro; "it hath a poor, unpromising exterior; a dry, fibrous rind, and a hard shell to crack; but within lies a milky centre, pleasant and wholesome to the taste."

"What if I find thee hollow, empty, rotten, like some light nuts?" said the king. "If so, best chuck thee away at once; and not lose time trying my teeth, while I try thee."

"Nay, I pretend not to be more sound than is good;" returned the stripling, with his bright, quick, gleaming eyes,—which had a strange wild light in them,—looking up into those of the king; "the nut that the worm affects, is oft the daintiest; and few men are the worse for those odd maggots of the brain, with which mine abounds. All I say is, try me, cousin king; and if I prove not worth the cracking, set thy heel on me, and crush me into nothingness for ever."

"I take thee at thy word, good fellow;" replied Cymbeline.

"And now tell me who thou art, and what made thee seek me, and stick to me, and claim cousinship with me."

"Thou remember'st that Corineus of Cornwall, who overcame the hugest of the giants, that lurked in rocks and caves on the Cornish coast? In their mortal wrestle, the monster, with a terrible hug broke three of the hero's ribs; whereat Corineus enraged, heaved him up by main force, and hurled him headlong from the cliff into the sea. These Island giants were not the only ones overthrown by his might; for before he came to Britain, Corineus had made war against the Tyrrhen giants, and with his irresistible battle-axe had mown them down like blades of wheat. This rod is a slip from the staff of that invincible weapon, when it lost its head, and its master used it as a club;" said the lad, bending, and caressingly handling the hazel-twig he held, with a look of wistful pride and fondness; "and that renowned Corineus, who bequeathed me the relic of his might, was my father."

"Thy father, was he?" said Cymbeline, laughing at the whimsical gravity of the lad, as he told the legend. "Seeing that Corineus flourished some centuries since, thou must be a son of giant growth in years, though not in bulk and stature."

"If Corineus were not my father, I know not who was;" said the young savage, with his vaguely-eager, gleaming eyes. "But of my mother I am sure;" he continued, lowering his voice, and creeping nearer to Cymbeline, as he walked close beside him at his bridle-rein, the king riding at a foot-pace, to accommodate his strange young companion, in whom he began to take much interest. "'Tis a sad history, but I will tell it to cousin king. She was one of the nine vestal priestesses, vowed to the service of our Druid temple, in the sacred grove adjoining this wood. She expiated her crime with her life; but I was saved from perishing with her, by the interference of a Druid revered by his brethren for peculiar sanctity, wisdom, and knowledge. He took charge of me from infancy, till lately, when he died, full of years and honour. He trained me with a view to make me one of themselves—a Druid. But whether it be that my brain hath too many vagrant fancies of its own, to be able to store soberer truths; certain it is, that I

could never master the multitudinous lore it behoved me as a neophyte to retain; and I have had reason to believe, that when once it should be discovered that I am unfit to become one of themselves, they would make no scruple of devoting me to the flames, the first time a human sacrifice was wanted."

"But it needs the taint of crime, to render a victim qualified for a sacrificial offering;" said the king, more gravely.

"When they can find none entitled by guilt to the privilege of burning," said the lad, with a quaint dryness in his manner, "they e'en content themselves with plain virtue; when nigritude fails, they make shift with simple purity; and when no acceptable blackness is at hand, they will put up with spotless and immaculate whiteness, rather than want a victim; and thus should poor innocent I have stood a chance of honourable ashes."

The king looked at the figure of the young savage, as it stepped along, alert, vigorous, sinewy; but although of such short stature as to be almost dwarf-like, it was neither stunted, nor disproportioned. His face was a strange mixture of intelligence and inanity. At one moment his restless eyes would brighten with a look of almost supernatural comprehension; at another assume a dreamy expression, as though their sense lacked understanding. The chief characteristic of his whole appearance, however, was that of a fearless erectness of spirit and body.

"And thy name, boy? Thou hast not yet told me how I am to call thee;" said Cymbeline.

"I am called Bergion;" returned the lad. "They named me after that noble warrior, brother to the famed Albion, Neptune's giant son; who gave his own name to this white-cliffed isle. When I think of cousin king, I call it Britain; when I think of itself,—as mine own fair, white-browed island, as mine own by right of descent from heroic Corineus, then I name it Albion."

"And thou art content to share its sovereignty with me, cousin Bergion?" said Cymbeline, willing to humour the stripling's oddity, which amused him.

"More than content; I gladly yield thee all my claims to

royalty, cousin king, provided thou wilt let me abide with thee, under thy protection. For mine own mystic right in the beauty, and freedom of the isle,—that is inalienably mine, so long as I keep possession of this hazel-wand, bequeathed to me from father Corineus. So long as a single fibre of it exists, and I retain it within mine own power, so long am I lord of the white-cliffed isle,—of that portion of it for which I care,—and of mine own life and being."

"And hath that slight rod such magic virtue?" said Cymbeline smiling, and extending his hand for the hazel twig, which the young savage bore.

"Nay, cousin king, all else I will give thee; but for this, an' thou demand'st it, or destroy'st it, thou destroy'st me. My existence, and all that makes existence of worth,—the love of fresh air, the joy in the green woods, the gladness of sunshine, the calm of the moon's soft light, would all pass from me, an' thou wert to insist on my yielding thee this slight wand of hazel."

"Far be it from me to exact so vast a sacrifice;" said the king laughing. "Keep thy rod of might; and give me thy fealty, and thy loyal love."

"They are thine already, cousin king;" said the lad, fixing his eyes with a clear frank look of pure sincerity, upon the face of Cymbeline. "I sought thee at first for the sake of thy powerful protection; I have since attached myself to thee by the infrangible bonds of liking."

A deep-laid scheme of villainy awaited the return of Cymbeline, to undermine his best peace and happiness. There was a certain lord, named Mempricius, who was one of Cymbeline's court, at the time when the king had wedded his wife Guendolen. This sleek courtier, had, in one desperate moment, dared to avow his ardent passion to the young queen. Guendolen's virtue made her profoundly resent this insult; but hers was not a nature to rebuke it by open reproof and dismissal. She contented herself with a complete repulse of the man, while she permitted him to retain his place and favour in the court of her husband; thus giving another proof of the many

evils arising from timidity, and want of encouraged confidence, on the part of a wife. The crafty Mempricius availed himself of this tacit reprehension. He set himself secretly to the collecting together of such facts, as, joined with unscrupulous fabrications, and false testimonies, should form a mass of evidence against her, which should indubitably work her downfall.

With a weak, and selfishly credulous man like her husband, this was not so hopeless a scheme. When the king returned from his western expedition, he was met by the hypocrite courtier with a well-dissembled honest grief. He disclosed the fictitious tale. By an artful train of falsehoods and forgeries, he succeeded in persuading Cymbeline that the queen had been false to him, had conspired with the king of the Coritani to deprive him of his throne, had aided in the nocturnal theft of the two young princes, and that, finally, the infant princess was not his own child.

Set firm, in the steadfastness of obstinacy, which is in fact the refuge of a weak nature, Cymbeline went straight to the apartments of his wife. She flew to welcome him, and the little Imogen clung to his knees, in all the fond ecstasy of recovering him; but the king held himself stiff and unmoved, and with a stern cold tone bade the women attendants leave the room.

"Take this child with you!" he said, pointing to the little Imogen still hanging about his knees.

"My good lord,—dear husband," faltered the trembling Guendolen, "are you well, that you speak thus, look thus? You are pale,—your lips are quivering—these cold, averted eyes—are you indeed ill?"

"Sick at heart,—poisoned in very soul;" he returned.

But when her husband went on to accuse her of falsehood, treachery, dishonour, she raised her eyes to his, and said, in a low, but distinct voice:—

"Can you believe this?"

"Too surely, alas, am I compelled to believe it;" returned he. "Not lightly, oh, not lightly, could I have credited the tale. But proofs, most damnatory proofs——"

"I am innocent;" she said simply. "If your own soul does not acquit me, I am content to submit to its award."

"Then hear me pronounce your sentence;" he said; "I have resolved, for the sake of mine own bleeding peace and honour,—that no public trial shall ensue. I take upon myself to be sole judge in this, mine own particular grief. As your condemnation is private, so shall be your penance. You shall neither be publicly shamed, nor publicly punished. You know that retired lodge, built for the chase, on the borders of the forest near here. To that betake yourself and your child; and if you wish to show that you really have no will but mine, remain there, shut up, apart from all other human being. I will take means that you shall be supplied with food, and all necessaries for life; but hold no intercourse with any one; keep yourself secluded, strictly alone in the world, henceforth." Adding as he turned away:—"And nevermore will I look upon your face, or that of your child, in this life!"

As he precipitately left the room, his wife dropped to the earth, as if felled by a heavy blow.

Not a voice was upraised, not a question was mooted against the proceeding of the king. He had despotic power, and he used it. The queen took her child in her arms, and wholly unattended, left the palace for her appointed lone retreat.

While, at the palace, all went on at the king's good pleasure, at the retired lodge in the forest, dwelt Guendolen and her child. To her stunned and bruised spirit, this solitude was not altogether unwelcome,—especially at first. But its effect upon her child taught her to perceive its weary wretchedness. The little creature moped; missed the luxury and brightness of its old home—above all it missed its playfellow father, with his indulgent frolics; it missed its constant playmate the young Posthumus, an orphan boy whom Cymbeline had educated at his court, with almost paternal care.

One day the mother was startled by a loud cry of joy, and spring of delight, from her child, as she sat upon her knee. Guendolen looked forth; and saw, rapidly approaching, the young boy, Posthumus Leonatus.

"I have found you! I have found you!" he exclaimed as he bounded into the place. "I knew you must be hereabouts, and I have never ceased hunting, till I found the exact spot."

The boy threw his arm round Guendolen's neck, and pressed his face against her bosom, to hide the tears which his manliness forbade him to give way to; then embraced his little playmate Imogen, who leaned from her mother's lap to hug him heartily in return.

"My dear boy, how came you here? How did you find your way? You must go—you must not stay—it is forbidden——I have fallen into the displeasure of——the king;" Guendolen's voice faltered here; but she resumed. "We all owe him duty and obedience. He has willed that I shall dwell here apart—alone—with my little Imogen; that we shall see no one, speak to no one. You will help us to observe his wishes, will you not?"

"If you wish it——" he began, but could get no farther.

"Come, Natus; come and play;" said little Imogen, who had not comprehended one word of the grave talk going on between her young companion and her mother; and who now thought it had lasted quite long enough, and that her claim upon him had some right to be attended to.

The way in which the young boy leant down to his little friend, and brought her by degrees, to the necessity for his leaving her, showed the impression the gentle queen's words had made upon him. He had won Imogen into seeing him prepare to depart, without a murmur; and as he turned to bid her mother farewell, Guendolen pressed the noble boy to her bosom with an approving warmth, which told him how fully his behaviour was appreciated. Taking one parting hug of the child, he turned away with a swelling heart, and left the lodge.

Guendolen redoubled her endeavours to amuse, and distract the child's thoughts from dwelling on this source of regret. But the sight of her favourite young companion, had powerfully revived all Imogen's desire for his society, and she was with difficulty won from brooding over this second loss of its cheerful influences.

Meanwhile, with creeping time, came to Guendolen a heart's thirst to behold her husband. It ever grew more feverishly, until it seemed to prey upon her like an inward fire.

Rumours of the king's being again engaged in war, reached her, by means of a wandering mendicant, who had asked a draught of water one evening at the forest lodge.

Cymbeline in his jealous rage had never rested until he had succeeded in opening hostilities between himself and the king of the Coritani. He had met the young chief hand to hand in battle and had slain him on the spot.

In double joy at the victory to his arms and the consummation of his revenge, Cymbeline resolved to celebrate this conquest with especial splendour and rejoicing. Among the sports devised for the occasion, there were to be gladiatorial exhibitions, and human encounters with wild beasts, after the manner of the Romans, as Cymbeline had witnessed, when a young man, at the Imperial court. An arena was being enclosed for the purpose, by means of felled trees, and firmly-driven stakes, near to the temple of Jupiter, in Lud's town, where the celebration was decreed to take place.

All this, Guendolen learned of the mendicant traveller; who gossiped of his own accord, while he rested and took refreshment, which she could not refuse to his need.

Long after he had departed, she revolved what he had told concerning the appointed royal celebration and public triumph. The idea, that here was an opportunity of beholding her husband, of seeing him, herself unseen, had suddenly come upon her. "He need not see this poor offending face and form—but I feel that I die, if I see not his; and look upon them I will, e'en though I die the next succeeding moment." With this decision whispered to her heart in its desperate agony, Guendolen took her child in her arms, and set forth upon her pilgrimage that same day.

Painfully, on foot, now resting by the way, now toiling onwards, did this gentle lady perform her tedious journey; lifting her little one up, and bearing her slowly forward, when Imogen's slender strength failed her. At length the whole distance was surmounted; and the mother and child, on

the very eve of the celebration, entered the eastern gate of Lud's town. In a house of the humblest description, Guendolen obtained a night's shelter and food, of a charitable widow, who gave hospitality to the wayfarers, little thinking who she was harbouring.

Next morning—shrouded in her long, dark garments, and her face completely concealed by the sagum, or cloak, then usually worn—Guendolen, with her child in her arms, took her station among the crowd that thronged the arena; and by degrees, made her way close to where the king and his court were to be seated.

The press increased so much, that Guendolen, alarmed for the safety of her child, crouched near to one of the guards, who was keeping the limits of the space appointed for the reception of the royal party; and the man, noting her distress, and struck with the beauty of the child, favoured them a little by hedging them in, and contriving to afford them the shelter of his brawny person, saying, as he did so:—"What a plague made you bring that pretty bantling hither, mistress, into all this bustle and hubbub? But since you're here, sit ye down snug and close, and nobody'll be a bit the wiser, and pretty moppet there'll be safe."

She followed the man's directions to the letter; and found herself seated within a few paces of him, whom she had come to look upon. The moment her eyes caught sight of his face, they fastened upon it; and from that moment, among all the multitude, she saw, she heard, but him alone.

The child tired by the noise, and dust, and glare, sat quietly upon her lap, leaning against her bosom, half asleep.

Presently a pause in the performances of the arena, gave an interval of conversation and repose to the spectators. The king among others, quitted his seat, and, surrounded by a group of his favourite gentlemen, came nearer towards the spot occupied by the trembling Guendolen—so near at last, that she could almost have touched his robe, as he stood, with his back towards her. While her breath seemed suspended, and she could have heard the beating of her pulses, the king talked on.

His voice, so near, and so loud, caught the ear of the half-

slumbering little one. She lifted her head, listened, looked about, and at last exclaimed :—"I hear papa!"

Her mother drew her close within the folds of her cloak, and attempted to hush her into silence; but the child was not to be restrained.

Again she looked forth earnestly; all around her. "See there! There he is! Papa! Papa!" she exclaimed in a transport of joy, as she recognized his figure, standing at a few paces from them.

But the figure never moved; the back was still turned towards them; the loud, smiling talk was proceeded with, as though nothing had occurred to interrupt it.

So long as their royal master chose to act perfect ignorance of his wife and child's being there, his obsequious train were bound to second him, even though they saw the outstretched arms of Imogen, heard her joyous cries, and guessed at the identity of the muffled figure upon whose knee she sat.

Without a hint that could betray his having heard the voice, or so much as a glance towards the spot where sat the shrouded woman, Cymbeline was about to return to his former seat; when suddenly, a fearful roar was heard, and through the midst of the press, came ramping a large lion, that had broken loose from one of the dens of the arena, immediately towards the spot where the king stood. In a trice, the flying crowd cleared a space; and right onward sprang the ferocious beast with wild leaps, mane erect, eyes glaring, and loud, fierce, angry roars.

With that rapidity of thought, and instinctive action, that love alone knows, Guendolen had cast her child into the arms of the nearest person, and thrown herself immediately before her husband. In far less time than it takes to tell it, the wife's body had interposed, and received the whole shock of the animal's assault. Mangled and bleeding she sank upon the earth, while a look of heavenly content irradiated her face. Cries of horror and pity burst forth on all sides; a hundred weapons were turned upon the lion by the rallying crowd, to despatch him; while the whole confused scene swam and receded before the eyes of the dying queen.

Her husband hung over her in a paroxysm of remorseful anguish.

"My wife! My Guendolen! Dear injured patience! Can you forgive me?"

"Have I aught to forgive?" she murmured. "You believed that I deserved your rigour."

"Such belief in itself was worst injury. Too late, I feel this now;" cried he.

"Grieve not for my death, oh most best beloved!" she said faintly, but happily; "it has been vouchsafed me, to prove that I could not have practised against thy life."

Suddenly the fast-dimming eyes of the gentle queen re-lumed with an eager expression as she murmured:—"Our child—you will take her to your heart as before?"

"Solemnly, I take Heaven to witness that I will henceforth be to her a father in kindness and in love, as surely as I believe myself to be her father in the truth of thy white and spotless faith, mine innocent, injured wife!" he said.

With a smile of more than mortal happiness, Guendolen expired.

The person into whose arms the little Imogen had been hastily placed by her mother, was no other than Posthumus Leonatus. The boy had seen the child, had recognized the shrouded figure in whose lap it sat, and had kept his station close behind them, to watch over their safety. He had thus been at hand to receive the little one, at the moment its mother started up to rush to her husband's side. Imogen, delighted to find herself with her favourite, had been so happily engaged prattling to him, that she had escaped the terrible sight of her mother's death. Her young friend had borne her safely home to the palace; and he kept the child amused and happy, until her father should inquire for her.

The king evinced his gratitude for the boy's kindly thought towards his little daughter, by an increased liking and confidence. He encouraged him in his care and protective liking for the young princess; and permitted him to be her constant companion and playfellow. He appointed ladies of known dis-

cretion for her women attendants; and took every pains to show that she was reinstated as his beloved daughter, and the acknowledged heiress of his throne and kingdom.

The conviction of his wife's innocence had struck Cymbeline with indisputable self-evidence in the scene of her death; and the crowning proof of her purity and faith, came in the shape of a dying message, from him who had been her traducer.

It was not until the queen was dead, and her child restored to its father's heart and home, that this last testimony of her unblemished honour reached her husband. But it was welcomed by him as the conclusive proof of her worth; and he heaped rewards and honours upon him who brought it—the nephew of Mempricius, named Cloten. He was a swaggering, pretentious young fellow, with about equal shares of vulgar cunning, self-conceit, and obtuseness.

Between this young gentleman, Cloten, and the lad, Bergion, there was a perpetual word-sparring going forward. Each enjoying the favour of the king, the one as a rising courtier, the other as a sort of privileged page-jester, they were frequently in collision and encounter.

As the boy, Posthumus Leonatus, advanced in years, and became more of a companionable age with the two others, he often amused himself by noting the constant war of speech that went on between them; and took pleasure in drawing them out.

"Yonder servile lackey-lord," said Bergion, nodding contemptuously towards a young courtier, who had been inquiring after Cloten, "makes a god of this insolent boor; who repays him by making a dishclout of him. But, in sooth, he deserves no better that can cringe to such a thing as Cloten."

"Thou hast no liking for my lord Cloten?" said Posthumus, smiling.

"What is there to like in him? Hath he not an ugly, morphewed nature; all distorted and crusted with self-conceit? Is he not a burly bully, ever vapouring, and talking big, and doing battle with shadows of his own creating? Hath he not a malignant tongue; a ribald contempt for good? Is he not

hebete, and dull of brain? Doth he not swear, when he is at a loss for words; and heap abuse, when he cannot find retort? What he lacks in wit and argument, he makes up in bluster, and violence of gesture. He lays down the law, like a man sowing broad-cast; and when he would carry a point, he flings about him like a thrasher."

"'Tis a fair picture of my gentleman, indeed;" laughed Posthumus.

Just then, in came Cloten, fretting and fuming, blurting out his words by fits and starts, as was his wont.

"Paltry, scurvy fellow!" he exclaimed; "I won't abuse my sword, by crossing it with him. But I'll use it to fustigate him, as with a cudgel. A man that hath done what I have, need fight no more to prove his valour. Certain feats achieved, as they have been, methinks I have done enough."

"Done enough! No man hath done enough, until he have done the last thing he can do,—died;" said Bergion.

"Art thou there?" said Cloten, looking over his shoulder, at the lad, who sat quietly in a corner, twisting his hazel-switch into various forms of coil and circle.

"A marvellous silly clench! And altogether worthless sophism!"

"And when do you propose to punish this offending lord?" asked Posthumus.

"Forthwith,—immediately,—this very afternoon;" answered Cloten. "No time like the present."

"Save the past and future, which are wonderfully semblant with it;" said Bergion drily.

"I know thou liv'st altogether in the past, like a poor dreaming losel as thou art. Thou content'st thyself with the deeds of thy Cambrian ancestry, in lieu of valour of thine own. Thine only courage is intrepidity of belief; gravely crediting the feats of the cow, Camdoga, who filled all the dairy-pans in thy native mountains, in one night;" said Cloten, with a horse-laugh.

It was a favourite amusement with him, to taunt the lad with his Welsh origin, and to scoff at the legends of his country.

"For me, I'm neither soldier, nor civilian;" said Bergion

quietly; "your lordship's a military man, therefore I can't expect you to be civil."

"A civilian, quoth'a? Thou'rt scarce civilized, fellow. A half-reclaimed savage; barely better than a brute,—untamed, untaught, save in those foolish traditions and tales, flogged into thee by thy masters, the Druids. Do I not know that thou'rt only learned in fables, wise in figments?"

"And a man may do worse, than store his memory with the high actions of those who have gone before him;" returned Bergion, with the thoughtful look settling upon his face, that it usually wore, when he spoke upon such themes. "They teach him how he should himself act and live, so as to earn self-respect; and to command, or at all events, deserve, both good-will and honour from his fellow-men. Where is the idleness of learning to reverence Hu the mighty, who came from those sunny lands of the South, called by our bards 'the Summer country;' and settled in our water-guarded island; and became famous for making Poesy the vehicle of Memory and Record? Wherefore should we not feed our fancy by hearing of Gwrgant Grim-beard, whose squadron encountered a tower of glass, in the midst of the Irish seas, and all but one vessel rashly attacking it, perished; while the king's ship, bearing on board sagacity, caution, and experience, warily surmised it to be an iceberg floated down from the remote Northern ocean; and so steering clear, avoided destruction? And may we not be the better for musing of Hyfaidd, the tall, whose deeds were applauded by men, and blessed by Heaven?"

"If he were so tall a man, would he were alive, that I might lower some of his lofty pride, and abate somewhat of his giant might;" said Cloten. "I cannot abide to hear of fellows of such towering pretensions, without a desire to bring them down from their presumed height."

"To level them to an equality of baseness with those who envy them?" replied Bergion; then turning to Posthumus again, he continued:—"Surely, 'tis a pregnant lesson, to ponder on the doings of Bladud; how he discovered med'cinable waters in a certain spot in the West; and built a town and temple there, consecrating them to Minerva; and how, after-

wards, growing rash in conceit of his own powers of invention, he made him wings to fly; which upbore him but just above the height of the temple, whereon he fell, and was killed. And we may find worse study, than the memory and example of Dunwallo Mulmutius, great and good, worthy first to wear a golden crown; who framed wise laws, promoted the welfare and protection of his subjects, and, in memory of peace restored, built the temple of Concord, within our goodly city of Lud's Town, erst called Trinovant. Then, for those who have neither kingly ambition, nor kingly power to enact kingly deeds, there are the fames of such men as Idris, the far-eyed, Gwydion, the son of Don, and Gwyn, the son of Nudd, the three sagest astronomers in Britain; whose knowledge of the stars and their influences was so great, that,—as our Bards have sung,—it were to be wished it could have been preserved till the day of doom. But," added Bergion, with the wild light gleaming from his eyes, "'tis the only drawback I find in the godlike gift of knowledge; that it cannot be bequeathed. A man stores up sumless treasures of learning and science in his own mind, but he cannot transmit them to his posterity. They perish with their storehouse, his brain; they rot and are buried, with the carcase wherein they were hatched."

"As such mouldy, maggoty rubbish should be!" exclaimed Cloten. "Here is a brainsick madman that would fain blow a bubble big as the globe!"

"And here is a prince content to pen his brains within the compass of a millet-grain!" said Bergion. "Meekest and humblest of princes!"

"Taunt not me, thou son of a sainted,—or rather, tainted,—vestal!" cried Cloten.

In one second, Bergion sprang upon the burly braggart, caught him by the throat, and, for all his superior bulk and weight, shook him to and fro like a reed. The young savage was agile of limb, strong of sinew, and possessed of a grasp like a vice, for all his slight make; and moreover his spirit when roused, was fierce as a wild beast's. The scoff at his mother, had done what no insolence to himself could effect; it had stung him into resentment.

Leonatus stepped forward to interfere, and make peace; but Bergion, having slaked his rage by treating Cloten as a mastiff might have used a mongrel cur, loosed his hold, flung him off, and walked leisurely away.

"White-livered rascal!" exclaimed Cloten, looking after him; "he knows, that for the sake of my lord the king, who favours him, I shall not disgrace the royal precincts by a quarrel, and a contention. He takes advantage of his jester's privilege to attack me, knowing it would be beneath the dignity of my weapon to challenge such a peasant slave and churl as he!"

"You do well and wisely to forbear him, my lord;" said Posthumus.

"Well, for this time, I forgive the varlet;" said Cloten.

Among Cymbeline's Gaulish connections, was one, who had been more than commonly allied in acquaintance with him, in former years. This was a chief of the tribe of the Averni, a man of bold sagacity and skill in policy. He had an only daughter, about Imogen's age; and he proposed to his old associate that his daughter should come over to the British court, and spend some time with a princess of whom he had heard the most advantageous reports. Cymbeline despatched a band of chosen gentlemen from his own court, to escort the French princess to Britain. At the head of this convoy of honour, the king appointed Posthumus Leonatus. He instructed him to show especial attention to the princess; and charged him to omit no opportunity of pleasing her, and of winning as much as possible her confidence and trust.

The princess Eponine was extremely proud of her appointed knight, Posthumus Leonatus. He was by far the handsomest and most accomplished man of all Cymbeline's court; and she was peculiarly flattered by having this gentleman, of all the British court, selected for her especial guardian and protector. She seemed never better pleased than when she could exhibit him in this light, and manifest at once her power over him, and her approval of him.

The visit of princess Eponine had taught a secret to two people. Posthumus was asking himself the true source of cer-

tain powerful emotions that arose within him, consciously, for the first time. He had been brought up in so perfect a brotherhood of intimacy with the princess Imogen, he had been so accustomed to consider her as though she had been a younger sister, that he had never dreamed of asking himself what was the nature of the feeling with which he regarded her. He now felt that this gentle being who lived in his thought as an angel of innocence and goodness, was no less passionately beloved as a woman; and that while he had hitherto believed he respected her as the daughter of his sovereign and benefactor, he now found he was enamoured of her as man loves the one woman in the world whom he would make his other self.

But, even while making this discovery, came a sense of the fidelity he owed to the compact between himself and his king, with regard to this Gaulish princess. He determined, that while she remained in Britain, he would strictly fulfil the part of her devoted knight; and that no circumstances however annoying to himself, should induce him to betray a reluctance to comply with her lightest wish.

While Posthumus Leonatus was questioning himself as to the source of his feelings towards Imogen, she herself was no less earnestly examining her own heart upon the unwonted agitation it had experienced, at sight of Leonatus' devotion to the French princess, and at the sedulous way in which Eponine took pains to manifest her own pride in her knight, and to attract his admiration in return. Unable to come to any conclusion as to the nature of his feeling towards her; she only too certainly became aware that she herself had undoubtedly given him her whole heart, exclusively, devotedly, and for ever.

On one occasion, Posthumus, having been detained near the king for a time, hastened to join the princess Eponine, whom, in consequence of the king's instructions, he rarely lost sight of. He found, on inquiring for the French princess, that her young hostess had accompanied her forth for an exploring long walk; and that when some of the ladies and courtiers had offered to attend them, Eponine had forbidden their following,

declaring that she had a mind for a quiet ramble alone with Imogen.

He hurried after them; and as his footstep caught the quick ear of Imogen, she turned, and the expression of her face was the usual ingenuous look of welcome, which it ever involuntarily wore at his approach. As the French princess also looked back, she exclaimed joyously:—"Ah! here is my own knight come in quest of us! Happily arrived, good sir; for my walk has tired me, and your support will be right grateful."

She took his arm as she spoke, and leaned upon it with her usual easy freedom, and then went on with her wonted volubility, showing how little she was really fatigued.

Leonatus led the French princess towards a green mound, that afforded a pleasant seat, and begged that she would take some rest; while he placed Imogen beside her.

"Just one of your admirable pieces of thought for me, my kind knight!" said Eponine; "this repose is most welcome; and this seat a most charming one! How grand and solemn the thick verdure of these Druid oaks above our head; and how imposing the effect of yonder simple stone altar; and what a dizzy depth of ravine beside us!" she exclaimed, as she peeped over into the sheer chasm, on the brink of which the mound was situated. "'Tis a fearful pit; dark, and well-nigh fathomless, as it looks from here, to us above. It might be the lurking-place of monster, giant, or wood-demon. It gives one a pleasant shudder to peer down into the murky abyss."

Eponine turned away from gazing down into the abyss; and with her usual inconsequent way of flying from subject to subject, said, as she looked at a string of pearls, which Imogen wore about her throat:—"I used often to hear of the orient beauty of your British pearls. Those are of matchless size and hue. Let me examine them more nearly. They are the finest I ever beheld."

The French princess held out her hand, as she spoke; and Imogen could do no less than untwine them from about her neck, saying, as she did so:—"I value them beyond their worth as gems; they were the gift of a dear friend,—my best friend."

"Your father;" said Eponine in a decisive tone.

Imogen made no reply. But the pearls were really the gift of Posthumus Leonatus.

"They are priceless;" said the French princess, admiringly; "so marvellously clear, large, and even. I must win my father's consent to bring away with me from Britain, just such necklace, as his present, and as a remembrance of my happy sojourn here, ere I return to Gaul;" said Eponine.

While she said this, the French princess had been absently whirling the string of pearls in airy circles round and round one of her fingers; when suddenly it spun from her hold, and dropped sheer down into the chasm.

She made a vehement exclamation; and a hurried apology to Imogen.

The latter abruptly arose, with a look of concern; then as suddenly reseated herself, saying as calmly as she could:— "'Tis no matter; they are gone. You could not help it. Let us not grieve for what is past recall. Think no more of them."

Posthumus could not help feeling a pang, at hearing her treat thus lightly, as he thought, the loss of his gift.

"Think no more of them! But I must think of them! I do think of them!" exclaimed the French princess. "Since you care for them so little, how say you to yielding what right you had in them, to me? A match! If I can recover them, they are to be mine! It shall be so!"

"I said not so; I agree to no such match;" said Imogen with more of eagerness than she had yet shown.

"Nay, but I will at all events assay my hope to redeem them!" cried Eponine, with her usual vivacity of manner. "On you, I rely, my good knight to regain them for me. To such prowess as yours, the plunging into yonder rocky gulf is nothing redoubtable. You will venture it for me, will you not?" she said with a sparkling eye, and eager voice.

"Most willingly;" replied Leonatus, as he stepped upon the bank, and prepared to descend.

"Do not think of it! Indeed, I care not for the trinket! Leonatus! Do not attempt so perilous a descent!" cried Imogen, her sweet voice raised in entreaty.

But there was something in the very plea she used, which urged him onward. "Though you prize not the bauble;" he said, "yet I will do my best to recover it. I may not refuse her highness's challenge to my knightly duty."

He scaled the brink of the precipice, and made his way downwards; holding fast by the straggling sprays and twigs that presented themselves; clinging to the rugged inequalities of the rock; and breaking his fall, as he leaped from point to point, by the small trees and underwood which grew among its interstices; and which formed a rough tangle of foliage covering the sides of the narrow chasm.

He had got nearly out of sight, when the two ladies, who were breathlessly watching his progress, heard a crash among the boughs, and saw him sink suddenly down, far beyond their ken.

A death-like pause of a few moments; and then the voice of Leonatus, called out in a cheerful, resonant shout:—"I have them! I have them!" Shortly afterwards they could discern him again; clinging, climbing, straining, and toiling, on his upward path; until at length he reached the spot where they stood.

"Here is the string of pearls;" he said. "To whom am I to tender it?"

"It is mine,—fairly mine! Won by the courageous daring of mine own faithful knight!" exclaimed the French princess, exultingly.

Posthumus, remembering the king's injunction, was about to do as she wished; when Imogen calmly said: "They are yours. Do me the favour to accept them as my willing gift. That which hath enhanced their value in your highness's eyes, hath stripped them of it in mine. That they nearly cost a brave man's life to regain, would henceforth mar their beauty, rather than endear them to me. I am well pleased that your grace hath a fancy for them; since I can gladly and freely present them to you."

"And I as gladly and freely receive them;" said the French princess, gazing at them delightedly, and passing them round her neck. "They are beautiful as gems; dear to me as coming

from my sweet princess of Britain's hand; and precious for the testimony they afford of a gentleman's gallant conduct."

The princess Eponine and her train were to take ship from the port of Lud's town; and there, just before embarkation, Leonatus had an opportunity of going to the principal pearl merchant's in Britain, and obtaining another string of equal beauty, with those he had before procured.

Posthumus enclosed the string of pearls in the but two lines which he trusted himself to write; confided the packet to a faithful attendant, named Pisanio, with strict charge to deliver it into the hands of the princess Imogen; and then set sail for Gaul.

The mere sight of this messenger, whom she knew to be a trusted servant of Posthumus Leonatus, caused Imogen a thrill of delight. That he should have been expressly sent to bring word of his master's departure, was in itself a kind of comfort for that departure, which had caused her many an involuntary bitter feeling, unrelieved as it had necessarily been by word or token of leave-taking.

Her bitterness had been the bitterness of regret; never of resentment, or unkind construction. Her gentle patience was duly recompensed, by the joy she experienced, when Pisanio placed in her hands the packet his master had enjoined him to deliver. Leonatus had sent her under his own hand, words of remembrance and valediction! He had sent her his farewell in penned substance; a tangible something that she could hold to her heart, and press to her lips, and weep over in mingled sadness and comfort.

She hastened away to her own chamber, to read her treasure in the full luxury of solitude.

The string of pearls fell well-nigh unheeded into her lap, while her eyes fastened on the few words in his hand-writing, inscribed on the paper that enclosed the gems:—

"To replace those so nobly yielded.
"Yours (in all the loyalty and truth of that word)
"LEONATUS."

**

Her first emotion was one of pure, unalloyed rapture,—a

transport of conviction. "He loves me! He loves me! 'Yours!' My Leonatus! Mine! Mine own Leonatus!" And the paper was bathed with a flood of passionate tears and kisses.

Then came the reaction of heart-humility, and self-doubt; the magnifying of his merits, and dread of her own insufficiency and unequal worth, to deserve so glorious a preference; and all the thousand and one generous misgivings with which genuine love torments itself.

In the restless, pensive mood which became Imogen's after the departure of Leonatus, she frequently wandered forth into the oak grove; there, alone, in the thickest of its green shades, to indulge, unseen, her involuntary melancholy. This woody scene, with its canopy of trees, its Druid altar, its grassy mound, its bramble-grown chasm, peculiarly fostered these suspenseful reveries. It revived those manifestations of Posthumus's most marked deference towards the French princess; it recalled her animated looks of encouragement, his tokens of submission to her lightest wish, his devoted manner. And then arose the thought, was there not a probability that this bright, beautiful being, had possessed peculiar fascination for a man like Posthumus, well fitted to judge of brilliancy, and sprightliness, and sparkling grace.

Imogen was as high-minded as she was gentle-hearted. She had a certain vigour of nature,—nowise inconsistent with the tenderest sensitiveness,—which in her supplied the teaching that is in most instances the offspring of exalted intellect.

It was thus that, unguided by aught save her own inborn sense of right, Imogen learned to discern that she was acting unworthily of her own character, and risking injury to its best strength, by continuing to indulge in these morally enervating solitary walks and reveries. She had just attained to a vague perception of this, when her idea was confirmed by a strong and singular impression, that came upon her like a direct vouchsafement from Heaven.

It was one of those clear, bright, December days, that sometimes occur in the depth of a winter season; and although the year wanted but a single week to its close, no sign of frost, or

snow, was upon the earth. The oak grove was wrapt in that solemn silence which forms one of the chief charms of forest scenery; the glossy leaves and red clusters of the holly underwood, looked full of vital cheerfulness; the lofty trees reared their giant heads, and gnarled trunks, and spreading arms, in sylvan majesty; the pearly berries, and small, green, rounded leaves of the mistletoe, clung to the branches in beautiful abundance, adorning the venerable parent stock with their fresh vivacity; the sky was blue and serene; and the sun shone warm and brilliant, to enliven and to gladden all.

Imogen felt that it was an ingratitude to Nature to shut her heart against the invigorating influences of such a scene. She felt reproached by the brightness of such a day accorded in the midst of the sullen season, for yielding feebly to the mistrusts and fruitless solicitudes of uncertainty. The hopefulness of the day seemed to rebuke her despondency, and to accuse her of weakness, thus to encourage idle dreams of conjectural evil, when all might be well. Was it not a kind of treason to the faith of her own love, to allow it to spend itself in vain anxieties and uneasy surmises? Why should it not rather seek to fortify itself with a noble trust, a patient, constant hope? Out of meekest and humblest endurance came strength and courage; as out of lowliest weeds, and least observed herbs, balm and healing were extracted.

As these thoughts passed through her mind, Imogen sat on the grassy bank, her chin resting on her clasped hands, her eyes bent on the slanting rays, that penetrated the woody depths before her; when, as she gazed, the flood of sunshine seemed insensibly to expand and dilate into a pervading light—soft, yet vivid; serene, yet intense. It seemed compounded of all that was tranquil and hopeful, at the same time that it was penetrating and refulgent. It seemed to fill the air, as with a universal benignant promise; the shining forth of a manifest Peace, and Joy, and Comfort to all men. It seemed to stream forth enlightenment and revival to the whole world; to bring sustaining help, and exalted trust; to teach mercy, forbearance, kindliness; to show the folly and wickedness of strife, the iniquity of uncharitableness. Calm and healing for the wounded

spirit seemed to flow from this mystic radiance, as it shed its beams upon all around.

The Druid oaks in their sturdy bulk, the rude altar of solid stone, dedicated to pagan worship, all the substantial evidences of the real scene that environed her, were blotted out from the sight of Imogen, as she steeped her senses in the pure effulgence that poured its mild lustre upon every object, and seemed to absorb their materiality into its own prevailing light. It seemed to have the power of casting into shadow and nothingness all that was grossly palpable and actual; while it shone forth with its own irresistible force of clearness and purity, declaring the one true and divine Essence.[1]

After that day, Imogen felt as though she had acquired a tranquillity of spirit until then unknown. It seemed beyond her comprehension; but she sought not to analyze its source, she was contented to feel its effects. It brought a wisdom of its own, which taught her to restrain her former tendency to indulge in solitary musing, with vain revolving of thoughts she could not bring to satisfactory issue; and until Posthumus should return, she determined to occupy herself with deeds of charity and active usefulness, instead of enfeebling her mind and body with profitless dwelling upon one round of ideas.

She had soon additional need of all that could inspire courage and patient endurance.

The threatened rising in the North, of which Cymbeline had had some previous warning, broke into open rebellion. The king of the Brigantes, dying suddenly of a surfeit at table, his subjects took the opportunity of joining the other malcontents, and an extensive insurrection was the consequence. The widow queen hastened up to the British court that she might engage Cymbeline's aid in her cause, and in the recovery of her son Cloten's rights, as his father's successor.

Cymbeline not only levied a large force of his own brave Iceni and Trinobantes, and sent it without delay to the scene of the disturbances; but he was so struck by the

[1] It was during Cymbeline's reign that Christ was born; and it is remarkable that Shakespeare's Imogen, in the spirit in which he has drawn her character, is the most Christian of his heroines.

great personal beauty of the widow queen, that he fell almost immediately into the snare which her wiliness enabled her to lay for him. So rapidly and so effectively did she conduct her plans, that she had brought Cymbeline to woo her into second marriage with himself ere she had been a sennight in his court. Her success in this project inspired her with another, as bold in its ambition. She determined to exchange her son Cloten's hope of the petty chieftainship of the Brigantes, for no less than the succession to the throne of Britain, by bringing about his marriage with the king's only daughter and heiress apparent, the princess Imogen.

When Bergion heard the news of the royal nuptials, he exclaimed:—

"How is this? Cousin king going to enter the unholy state of second matrimony? About to commit himself to the unblest condition of bigamy? Can this be true? Can cousin king have so far forgot what he owes to his own hope of happiness?"

"I'll tell thee what, Druid-dregs!" exclaimed Cloten; "for thine own sake, I counsel thee to keep that babbling tongue of thine within range. Thoud'st best, I can tell thee. Cousin king, as thou call'st him, is not one to be offended without bale to the offender. Witness, a certain soldier fellow I knew of, when I came first to court, that was general to king Cymbeline. His name was Belarius. And for all his previous favour he was cast into the slough of exile, on the first anger he gave his royal master."

"Cousin king is mad! He must have lost his wits more absolutely than I ever lacked mine!" exclaimed Bergion vehemently.

"How say'st thou, fellow?" said the voice of Cymbeline, who entered unperceived by Bergion. "Dost thou speak disrespectfully of me in mine absence? 'Tis enough if I permit thee the jester's privilege of slighting words in my presence."

"Cousin king, I have never said that, behind thy back, which I would not say to thy face;" said Bergion firmly, as he switched the hazel-rod he always bore about him, with a vehement cut through the air. "Oh, cousin king! Wed not with this widow-witch! This snake-queen! Give not to her that

place in your bosom, where lay the white innocence and patience whom you once called wife, lest you be thought the blinded madman I spoke of ere now."

"This passes our forbearance, sirrah!" exclaimed the king. "Away with him to the stocks!"

"By this token of our first meeting, cousin king," said Bergion, holding forth the hazel-wand, "think if it befit thine honour, that for a light word, far more for an earnest word, thou shouldst condemn thy faithful Bergion to an ignominious punishment."

"Pshaw!" said the king wrathfully, as he snatched the wand from the hand that held it forth; "away with him, I say!"

"Hold, cousin king!" exclaimed Bergion with a loud cry, that amounted to a scream.

But it was too late; the hazel-rod was twisted and rent in two, and thrown into a large fire that blazed upon the hearth, near which the king stood.

As the flames caught the slight rod, and consumed it rapidly, Bergion's frame quivered from head to foot; he turned ghastly pale; his arms fell at his side; his head dropped upon his bosom; and he stood like one bereft of sense and life.

Cymbeline turned away, repeating,—"See that my orders be obeyed. Let him be set in the stocks for the rest of the day. 'Twill teach him we are not to be trifled with. 'Tis fit all should learn this, who are about our person."

The next day was the one appointed for the ceremonial of the royal espousals. It took place with great magnificence; and while the new-made wife was in the height of her bridal influence, she broached to her enslaved bridegroom her desire for a union between her son Cloten and his daughter Imogen. The royal consent was as readily yielded as she could have wished; and the princess was informed of her father's intention to bestow her in marriage on Cloten, who had long made clumsy suit to her.

This intimation fell like a warning of death upon the heart of Imogen. It was conveyed to her by Cymbeline in his most peremptory style, just on the eve of his departure for the North, whither he was compelled to repair.

As the king was about to leave his capital, he suddenly bethought him of Bergion, whom he had never seen,—and never missed, during the engrossing period of his own nuptials,—since the day he had so harshly dismissed him from his presence.

"The lad lies in a languishing state, at the old forest-lodge, my liege;" replied one of the courtiers. "It is thought he hath refused all food—and so, starved into this condition; but others report that he is stricken to the heart by the grief he hath conceived of your majesty's anger against him, and thus pined away."

Cymbeline questioned the gentleman no farther; but as the forest-lodge lay in his road Northward, he resolved to visit the place himself, and gain personal assurance of Bergion's state.

The king could not avoid a remorseful remembrance of another former victim to his obduracy, as he approached the old dismantled lodge in the forest. It was hither that his innocent wife Guendolen, and their infant daughter, had been banished when they had fallen into his suspicion and wrath.

He pushed open the remnant of a door and found himself in the single room which formed the interior of the dwelling. On a low wooden settle lay stretched the figure of Bergion. Always lean and meagre, it now seemed a mere skeleton.

The king approached, and laid his hand kindly upon the shoulder, calling the lad by his name.

"The voice of cousin king!" exclaimed Bergion, as the old wild light gleamed in his eyes; and he would have sprung up, but his frame had lost its pristine vigour,—and it fell back nerveless.

"How is this, my poor fellow?" said Cymbeline. "How fell you into this despairful state,—and made no attempt to move me to its relief?"

"I had no hope to move you;" replied Bergion. "You had destroyed my last hope, when you destroyed my hazel-rod. Did I not tell you that my very life was bound up in that wand? And so it was; my trust in kindness, my reliance on all-loving, all-bounteous Nature, my faith in bonds of natural protection and sympathy, were unbroken, so long as that slender twig remained unbroken. So long as it remained mine, by the allowance and kindliness of cousin king, so long was I happy in mine existence, so long

had I a hold upon life. But when I saw it riven by his hand, hurled into the burning embers, I felt that I had no more to do with life. I resolved to make no farther struggle; to speak no word again; to touch no morsel more. But the voice of cousin king awoke mine own in spite of myself, as the sight of him beside me, brings a joy I never more thought to feel."

Bergion fixed his gleaming eyes upon the moistened ones of Cymbeline, as a faithful dying hound might have done; then making a motion for the king's hand with his own, he drew it beneath his lips, which closed upon it, as they sighed forth their last expiring breath.

While these events were passing in Britain, Posthumus Leonatus was fulfilling the mandate of his king, by conducting the princess Eponine with all honour and observance to the court of Gergovia. If her father had entertained any sinister views in sending his daughter on a visit to Britain, they came to naught; for she returned to Gaul with her head full only of her own engrossing partiality for the young Briton who had been appointed her knight.

Accordingly, when the prince of the Averni, rendering the young British knight warmest thanks for having brought his child home in safety, overwhelmed him with hospitable urgings for a protracted sojourn in their court of Gergovia, the princess Eponine smilingly joined her entreaties to her father's, secure that one word from her to this effect would be only too gladly complied with.

But to her amazement, Posthumus Leonatus courteously but firmly declined; alleging, that his duty to his king now performed, his return to Britain must be made without delay.

For Imogen, the return of Posthumus to Britain was fresh life, fresh hope. Hemmed in on all sides as she was, by a designing step-mother, a hateful suitor, and a father's despotic will, she had felt well-nigh faint of spirit. But with his return came confidence, courage, cheer of heart, and love itself. At their very first meeting their mutual secret was disclosed; and with its knowledge came abounding solace for all past doubt and suspense.

Only too well aware of her father's absolute disposition, Imogen chose rather to give herself to the man of her soul's

choice without consulting the king's decision, than by awaiting his sanction, to hazard an express prohibition. She accordingly consented to plight her wedded vows to Posthumus Leonatus in Jove's high temple; with the stipulation that her husband would there quit her for a season, until she could meet him where they should be less subject to curious eyes.

In all privacy the espousals were performed; and at the very gate of the temple, Posthumus Leonatus took leave of his bride, his Imogen, sustaining his courage under this needful temporary separation, by the exultant thought that she was pledged his, beyond the power of fate to divide them.

The king returned. Posthumus Leonatus made dignified avowal. But Cymbeline's rage knew no bounds. He pronounced instant sentence of banishment against Leonatus, and ordered Imogen into strict confinement, appointing the queen her safe-guard. This wily step-mother affected great sympathy with her victim, and even permitted the young couple a parting interview; but it was with the secret design of still farther exciting Cymbeline's wrath against them. Imogen was not the dupe of this pretended interest; for even amidst the anguish of leave-taking, she exclaimed :—"*O*

Dissembling courtesy! How fine this tyrant
Can tickle where she wounds!—My dearest husband,
I something fear my father's wrath; but nothing,
(Always reserv'd my holy duty,) what
His rage can do on me: You must be gone;
And I shall here abide the hourly shot
Of angry eyes; not comforted to live,
But that there is this jewel in the world,
That I may see again."

CYMBELINE, Act i. Sc. 2.

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